

# **THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND AND HOW TO FIX IT & WHY I STARTED AND RAN PUPPIES**

*By Ian Jorgensen (Blink)*



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# **THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND AND HOW TO FIX IT**



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THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND  
AND HOW TO FIX IT



*Chapter 1*

# **SHOWS RUN TOO LATE & BAND CHANGEOVERS ARE TOO LONG**

While not exclusively a NZ problem, it is significantly worse here than other countries I have visited. Shows more often than not start 10:30-11 and have long changeovers.

It's partly the venues' fault, they want people buying drinks for as long as possible so it's 'good' if the entertainment continues past 1am, therefore, most venues don't pressure bands to start early or changeover quickly but expensive bar prices mean most people do the bulk of their drinking at home before the show, which means they arrive at the venue late.

The biggest culprit though, is bands themselves. They pull all sorts of tricks to avoid playing to an empty room or go on first. If the show is organised by the headlining act they usually want to come across as laid-back cats and don't want to boss around the support bands to start early or changeover quickly.

Then there are those who turn up late hoping for a reduced door charge.

Add it all together and it means most people turn up to a show around 11:30pm-12am.

I am positive this is the one major deterrent for most people to go out to see a show. I know it often puts me off, not knowing exactly when the first band will start and not knowing what time I'll get home. I'm an old man now and when I get home at 3am it makes the next day a write off.

In the 90s, the two band line-up was standard for most shows in NZ. Over the past decade four-five band line-ups have become more common, bringing a whole raft of problems. Unfortunately nobody seems to be doing anything about this and shows are getting later and later. Most people have just accepted this and don't question it. In other countries though, shows are controlled more by venues. There are often clocks on the stage and bands are given strict time limits. Playing times are often advertised on posters and eventually it becomes public knowledge what times bands play at particular venues.

The system is set in its ways - but I believe a change could transform and revitalise the entire industry. So, how do you do it? First, I'll explain my long-winded ridiculous idea, and then at the end I'll give a few tips on quick fixes in the meantime.

“EVERYBODY WINS” – THE PLAN FOR A BETTER MUSIC SCENE.

I’ve always had a beef with late shows so when I started putting on my own gigs back in 2002, I always tried to run things early and on time. Whenever possible I tried to have a schedule visible to the public. I thought the only solution was to start shows early, but that didn’t exactly work. So around 2006 I experimented with this plan after I had realised that for change to be widely accepted everybody had to win: bands, venues, promoters, the public and the industry.

So what does everybody want?

THE PUBLIC: CHOICE.

The public want the option of an early show if they have to work/study the next day, or a late show when they want to get on the piss and stay out all night.

VENUES: MONEY.

Pretty simple really - they want as much money as possible. Venues don’t want early shows as they want people drinking through the night until their licence ends, and they don’t just want late shows because people will either drink at home or drink at other bars beforehand.

BANDS: EXPOSURE.

Whether it’s building a serious career or just playing for fun, there is only one thing that will make a live band successful: playing to as many different people as possible, as often as possible. The main difference between bands from NZ and overseas is that overseas acts tend to be tons tighter as they have more venues/opportunities to play. Cracks me up when a NZ band thinks they are busy playing 20-30 shows per year. Sadly, by NZ standards that is fairly active, but by overseas standards it’s not.

INDUSTRY: PROFESSIONALISM.

It doesn’t really matter what part of the industry you’re looking at (media, funding bodies, labels, government agencies) when you boil it down they are all looking for bands becoming more professional and getting more experience.

PROMOTERS: ALL OF THE ABOVE.

Promoters want more shows for the same cost, more money, more exposure and would love for local bands to be more professional.

Once I’d worked this out, the answer seemed obvious, and while it was a quick conclusion, one hurdle kept blocking the plan...

SAME LINEUP, TWO SHOWS, ONE NIGHT.

Sounds so simple.  
In 2006 I trialled this concept with about 40 bands. I ran matinee all ages shows at 6pm before regular R18 shows at 9pm – helping twofold because the lack of all ages shows in New Zealand, primarily though I wanted to see how the bands would deal with two performances in a row – and they all dealt with it with flying colours. However venues make no money from all ages shows so making all ages matinees a permanent thing does not benefit the venues.

So how do I see it working?

Two R18 shows per night. Obviously, it would be near impossible to get every venue in the country to agree to switching to a two-show-per-night format, it would be a logistical nightmare. So I suggest beginning with a few venues; one in each of the main centres. Those venues would have to agree that from then on every show was done twice per night. If it only happened sometimes, it would be confusing and kill the whole concept.

So, you've found four venues willing to embrace the concept. Now the venue decides on running times and schedules for all upcoming shows.

For example:

Early Show

*Doors: 6pm*

*First Band: 7pm*

*Second Band: 8pm*

*Third Band: 9pm*

(If there are two or four bands, obviously times would just be adjusted to suit. As long as show starts 7pm, and last band is finished by 10pm at the latest)

Late Show

*Doors: Never closed from early show (will explain soon)*

*First band: 11pm*

*Second band: 12pm*

*Third Band: 1am*

*Finish: 2am*

Before I get into the technical details I'll explain the one major epiphany I had.

For years, no matter how I shuffled things I couldn't work out how to convince all involved (promoters, bands, venues) to close the doors after the first show and kick everyone out to begin the second show. This headache sat with me for years then one day that the idea struck me and rounded off the entire idea.

The doors never close!

This is the perfect solution because it not only makes venues happy (not having to kick punters out between shows), but it means that the door charge doesn't have to drop/change. For example if a punter arrived at 8:30pm during the first show, they have time to catch the last band, but are welcome to stick around and catch the first and second bands at the next show. This means the cover charge remains right up until the very last band of the evening.

The only times you would close the door between shows is when you have been selling tickets to the shows separately and they are sold out or close to it. This would only happen in a few situations, and the slight annoyance of asking people from the first show to leave, is worth it if you're selling out two shows in one night.

So that's the very basic gist. However, what makes this plan brilliant is how it affects everyone involved.

Why it works -- the pros and cons:

#### THE PUBLIC

Pros: Finally they can go to shows when it suits them.

How many times have there been two shows on one night you've wanted to check out? How awesome would it be to go to an early show at one venue, walk down the road and go to the late show at another venue? You'd know exactly what time a show starts and finishes and that band changes will be quick and efficient. For the public it is perfect!

Cons: Absolutely none.

#### VENUES

Pros: Isn't it a venue owners wet dream to have people drinking in their bar from 6pm-2am? This is how it can happen all the time. For people to arrive at the early show they will likely come straight from work, odds are they won't have had time to drink anything. Capturing people before they drink privately is a bar's greatest wish.

Cons: Bars/venues have the most to gain from this concept, but they also need to take on more responsibility for it to work. Venues will need to make sure that effective stage management is in place. This is a long running oversight of bars all over NZ anyway. With this new scheme engineers will have twice as much work and they might also be responsible for stage management, so they may require more money. Venues would need to cover this; they cannot pass this cost onto bands who are now working twice as hard, playing two shows.

I am positive this plan would only cost venues an additional \$100-\$200 or so per night + additional staff costs. A small price to pay for more people in your bar for twice as long per night.

## BANDS

Pros: Something that sucks about New Zealand is that we're a small country with stuff-all places to play. If we play shows this new way, bands will play twice as much. Practise makes perfect, and playing early opens you up to a massive new market of professionals and older people who can't handle late shows. And you know what? These people actually have some disposable income and are interested in music, not like the broke students who are drinking Scrumpy till 11pm then coming to shows really drunk and are often more interested in hooking up than the music.

If you think playing two shows in one day might be tough, forget about it, it's just like sound-checking except it's fun and you play for slightly longer. Just ask any of the 40 odd bands I'd had play two shows in a day before. I've also had a few bands play three shows in one day, I've done two shows in one day at different venues and I've even done two (evening) shows of the same line-up on one night in different towns! – an insane story I won't go into here. And if you needed further convincing, just remember that in 2010 *Opshop* did a "10 shows in one day" campaign with *Air New Zealand*. Um, if the old men in *Opshop* can perform 10 times, I'm sure you can play twice.

Cons: I imagine it could take quite some time for this concept to catch on. We're talking about reversing years of conditioning. You could play to fairly empty early shows for a while, and the greatest risk of this idea is that it spreads the audience thinner. However, if this is a concern, it's time to get hard. Bands need to get used to performing to small audiences. How many people are gonna come see you play when you're overseas and have zero profile? You may as well get used to it now. Venues can come up with ways of shrinking the appearance of the room for the earlier shows too; bands playing on floor in front of the stage, use curtains to make area smaller, make room as dark as possible, move seating forward, etc.

When bands get the point of playing longer sets, 60-90mins etc, doing two sets in one night can be tiring, especially on tour – but for the opportunity of maybe making twice the income, this is not a major problem, and bands need to get used to working harder.

## INDUSTRY

Pros: The industry just want bands to be more professional, to get better and to be more active. This plan succeeds in fulfilling all of that. Most people in the industry are 30+ so earlier nights work better for them.

Cons: None?

## PROMOTERS

Pros: Ideal situation. A new market of older/professional people who can

afford to go to shows opens up. Production and promotion costs are the same, but can now offer more choice to customers.

Cons: Some bands might get precious at the idea of doing two shows in one day. I think this will be rare, and even most internationals will probably find the concept innovative, curious and worth trying. I know I'm always surprised when I ask an international to play more than one set at *Camp A Low Hum* (CALH) and they are more than happy to do it. Sometimes they totally go overboard, for instance, *Dan Deacon* did six performances at CALH 2010.

If they are unwilling to play twice in one night, just do one show. You could add a pre-party or after-party. Sweet. Solved.

#### MAKING IT WORK.

This person/martyr will basically have to liaise with venues to find a group of venues willing to do it, make sure the venues go through with it and perhaps produce a document to educate venues, bands, promoters, etc about the new regime. They'd need to keep tabs to make sure venues were following through and would need to drum up press to notify the general public of these major changes to the live music scene.

This is a massive concept. Venues need to commit to the project for minimum six months to a year to get it established. It will work and I'm sure it's actually much easier in practise putting together than it sounds here.

#### RUNNING A SHOW ON TIME FOR DUMMIES

**A**lways make sure that the band who is on first knows exactly what time they are to start and agree to this ahead of time – where possible, bands/promoters need to have a template of a shows running details which they can complete and Make sure the first band is line-checked (all their gear tested and all working), tuned, everything is plugged in and ready to go. Give the band a ten-minute prompt before their start time so they can tune, go to the toilet and get drinks. Give them a definite, non-negotiable finish time; if they start late they have to play a shorter set, no running overtime.

Sometimes I won't tell a band their start time but simply what time they need to be finished. Psychologically this works well because 10:30pm sounds better than 10pm. Also this means that if they choose, they can start a little late, but they definitely know what time they have to finish.

As band one is drawing to a finish, prompt band two to get ready. Bands

should also get used to helping their band mates pack down. So often I see bass players just grab their bass and walk straight off stage while their drummer stands around juggling their cases and cymbals, why don't you help your band-mates pack down once you're finished? Clearing off the stage after your performance should take around 2-3 minutes, though really it should take less than a minute. In the Smokefree Rockquest the changeovers take on average 2-4 minutes total... how did this devolve into 30-40 minutes as people got a few years older? Depending on the complexity of the setup, changeovers should take no more than 15 minutes allowing time for a quick trip to the toilet, picking up some refreshments and taking the stage 20 min's after the previous band finished.

If certain members of your band have fiddly gear to set-up, ie: a bunch of electronic gear using numerous DI boxes and 1000 leads, do all you can to help them; fetch them a drink, help them set-up everything they can beforehand at the side of stage, help them sort their stage power, help them problem solve any issues – only complete jerks set-up their own shit then bugger off while their band-mates struggle.

It's not hard to run shows to time. Everybody wants it to happen. Just do it.

#### ADDENDUM

*When I opened my bar Puppies in 2012 I ended up using a two shows in one night scheme, but instead of repeating the same show, I did two different shows, and advertised set times.*

*I talk more about this in the second half of this book - At Puppies we ran shows strictly to time with no problems for the whole 21 month life of the venue.*

*In a practical sense, running the shows like I did at Puppies and describe in more detail in the other book is a much more rational plan, however, I left my original essay here intact because I still think this is a fascinating concept and though a little pie-in-the-sky, I think if it did manage to happen, it could be amazing.*



*Chapter 2*

**NEW ZEALAND NEEDS  
MORE DIY VENUES**

DIY venues are essential for touring overseas, especially the USA. In the USA the minimum drinking age is 21, this has spawned a massive culture of DIY house shows since the only way that people under 21 can see shows (and this is a HUGE portion of the audience who watch music) is seeing them outside of a bar environment. These are not like conventional kiwi house parties. Shows at DIY houses run just like shows at regular venues. The houses have a website/ Facebook page. They do posters and online fliers, there are door charges, guests get stamped upon arrival. There are usually several bands playing, shows are regular; if not weekly - at least a few times monthly.

Recently in NZ there have been some amazing DIY venues. *Broadway* in Palmerston North during the mid 00's was a fantastic venue which regularly hosted touring bands. *The Eye of Night* in Wanganui was run for years by the late Al Cameron (ALC5) - After touring the USA with *Coco Solid*, he no doubt came home inspired and set up his house venue. It set the standard for how a NZ house party should be. (Addendum: Fantastic current DIY venues in NZ as of 2014 include *Space Monster* in Whanganui, *Dharma Bums Club* in Wairau Valley, *Tim's Place* in Marahau, *Garrett Street* in Wellington, *Pyramid Club* in Wellington among others)

If you want to make a real and positive impact on the local music scene, there is no better way than hosting shows, especially if you are outside one of the main centres. So, what do you need?

## CREATING A DIY VENUE.

### FINDING A VENUE

First off, you need to find a flat or space with a group of like-minded people. Everybody in the flat needs to be keen on the idea and at least one of you needs to have an idea of how to set-up and mix a basic PA, or have a reliable friend who can, or know how to ask questions of the internet.

If you don't already have a suitable place, look for a new flat. If putting on shows is a plan, then look at inner city flats, ideally one floor above street level on a busy retail street. These areas are used to lots of noise and the DIY venues

with most longevity tend to be in retail areas (empty in the evenings). If you are looking in suburbia, look for a house that has a huge, well-lined basement (So common in the US, yet not here). Failing that, a big living room at the back of the house, with as many walls between your neighbours as possible could also work. Lots of trees/foliage will help absorb a wee bit of sound. Avoid houses in a very flat area (lots of old people) or near a school (lots of families). You'll ideally need somewhere with an outside or smoking area which is other than on the street in-front of the property. To keep off the radar of your local Police your shows need to be as discreet as possible, backyards, rooftops, verandahs...

If you can find a warehouse above or near a factory that is really loud during the day you'll never have problems. Of course this could mean a real pain in the ass for living during the day, but shows won't be an issue.

Be careful of any lease you sign. Make sure that if you leave early there is no penalty, because if worse comes to worst and you're constantly getting hassles, you may want to find a new place. Or make sure if you're booted out there is no penalty.

Once you've moved in, keep only light and simple furniture in the lounge, so it's easy to make space quickly.

If you're not keen on using your flat, you could look into commercial spaces. Check the paper for warehouses, art spaces, gallery spaces, etc. This is a valid option, though not as easy as hosting at home as it starts to blur the line between a commercial endeavour and a DIY house venue. Local authorities may argue that it is not a private residence and then you will start having issues with alcohol laws.

If you do find a place in an industrial zone, check the legal side of if you can live there or not. There will be things like a certain amount of exits/fire safety plan/ hot water, etc. before a place is deemed legally liveable. Not like anybody is even gonna check on this anyway. Plenty of people live in spaces like this. I lived out the back of my bar Puppies for the first six months while I set it up (showering at the local gym).

### FORMING A VENUE

Decide on a name for the venue. Decide how often you are going to have shows. Depending on your neighbour situation, this could be only one a month, or maybe once a week. Maybe you are happy to have as many shows as possible.

All the flatmates need to agree to some ground rules. It's a good idea for all bedrooms have locks on the doors. There isn't really a problem with theft at house parties, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

### GEAR YOU'LL NEED

Start basic with a small PA with: an amp (capable of powering the speakers you get, 500+ watt or so), mixer, a couple of 100-200 watt speakers, a few microphones,

cables and some mic stands. You don't need top of the range stuff. You could probably pickup a budget set-up that will do the job for \$4-\$700 or less. At the same time as everybody puts in for flat bond, why not chip in for a PA rig? It'll only be an extra \$200 or so each. Slightly more expensive but easier is probably getting a pair of powered speakers. You can plug these straight into a little mixer without needing amps, so just makes things quicker and more idiot proof.

It doesn't need to be flash. This will be your biggest investment as a house party venue but don't worry, you'll easily be able to sell it when the flat dissolves, for not much of a loss.

If you don't know the difference between a DJ mixer and a PA mixer, stop right now. Maybe ask some local bands to help you buy a PA if you are unsure of what to get, do your research.

You'll need a few lights, the last thing you want is normal house lights. Easiest way is to get some coloured light bulbs and use these to replace your current ones when you have gigs. Get a couple of lamps around the place. You don't need to go overboard.

You'll need to get together a little 'door kit' for bands to take money at the door. Grab a decent box with a lid like an old lunch or tool box. Put in there a couple of stamps, a vivid marker, some pens and some paper. When bands come to play tell them to bring some change for a 'float'. Definitely charge for gigs right from the first one, even if its donation only. People need to get used to this early on. Don't worry, people won't get pissy, they'll understand that it costs money to do shows, they will be saving money by bringing their own booze and they should be happy to pay the same or more than shows at bars.

A common mistake with house parties is making entry cheaper, i.e.: A 4-band line-up that would usually be \$10 at a bar, but a house party thinks they should charge \$5 or make it free because "it's not at a bar". Thing is, it's actually the complete opposite, because your party will be BYO and people will save money on booze. Unless people are idiots they will realise that paying the same if not more than a pub show is totally fair. Don't undersell yourself, doing DIY shows requires effort, people will respect you and be happy to pay – after all, it's either your show or that boring bar again.

Keep an eye out for thin mattresses/bed rolls and keep a few handy, so bands can crash out on the floor after the party if they are from out of town. Lean them in front of windows during the show so they can help absorb sound and then, throw them on the floor after for punters to crash out on, or ya know...a sexy party.

That's it. You're ready to have parties. You'll find that most bands will just mix themselves, but it's good to have one flatmate who's always keeping an eye on the PA. Make sure you don't push the PA too hard. Bands will usually try to crank it too hard for too long and they'll overheat/peak/blow speakers. It won't be a problem if you keep an eye on it.

The main thing to remember when you are about to put on parties is that your first shows will set the precedent for both your customers and your neighbours, so get it right from the start. If you have neighbours and they aren't jerks they will probably be fine with a bit of noise on a Friday or Saturday night as long as it isn't all the time and you finish at a reasonable hour.

DIY venue shows don't have the same lateness issues as regular gigs. People can BYO, so they will come early and treat it as the start of the evening, not the end. Therefore aim to have bands finished by 10:30-11pm, midnight at the latest. This will keep you in good stead with the neighbours. If you have no sound issues go later, but don't push it; it's more important that you can continue to host parties and not get closed down.

Don't freak out if you see police cruising by. Just round everybody up and get them off the street. Police are primarily concerned with public drunken and disorderly behaviour, not a house party. They'll generally only shut down a party if they get several complaints about drunken behaviour or noise control has to make a second visit.

If noise control arrive, don't be an egg. Make sure there is always one person in control and can discuss what is happening (sanely) with the officer. They will issue you a written warning that means if you get another complaint in the next 72 hours they can seize your gear. By the time they arrived to serve the warning you likely already you got in a good 60-90 minutes of party. So turn it down, take a little break then (if you have more bands to go) give it a try and keep the volume down.

For this reason you should do shows with just one or two bands when you're starting out. Until you know how sweet your neighbours are and what you can get away with, just keep things simple and quick. It's not "punk" to have 2-3 long and noisy parties, piss off your neighbours, become a target for police and effectively kill your DIY venue dream. It is punk to do it smart, host parties for years and provide an environment where sweet out-of-town bands can do kick ass shows without succumbing to demands from pubs.

## LIQUOR LICENSING

To say it is a grey area when looking at liquor laws and how they relate to house parties is an understatement. It's pretty clear that this is kept purposefully vague so it can be interpreted by police as they see fit. It seems that the issue of alcohol at private residences does not come under the *Sale an Supply of Liquor Act 2012*<sup>1</sup> as there is no specific mention - it appears you'll need to check with your local body council for some clarification. There seems to be no clear definition

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.govt.nz>

of what a “private event” is. On the police website<sup>2</sup>, it declares that your event is only a private event if the guests are personally invited and you may not sell booze, however, it doesn’t go on to explain what happens if people are not “personally invited” - one can only assume they then come under the law of drinking in a public space – though this is never clarified. Even a website dedicated to explaining issues affecting youth<sup>3</sup> admit there is a lack of definition of what these private events are, so it’s open to interpretation.

I can’t find anything on the Wellington Council website<sup>4</sup> on their stance on the issue, though the Auckland City Council has the following information:

*If you want to sell or supply alcohol at an event (or series of events), you’ll need a special licence.*

You do not need a special licence when:

*You are supplying liquor to your guests in your own private residence*

*Your guests are bringing liquor to your own private residence*

To me this makes it pretty clear that, in Auckland at least, you’re able to supply alcohol or people are allowed to bring alcohol to your private residence, it doesn’t specify if they need to have been invited or not. The only time they mention anything like that is when the private event is happening in a public space.

You do not need a special licence when:

*You are holding a genuine private social gathering in a public facility such as a hall and you are supplying liquor to your guests, as long as the public is not able to access the event.*

By “genuine” – I assume that this means “personally invited”. So this all means to me that in Auckland it’s OK to throw a party in a private residence and for anyone to be drinking, even if there is a charge – it just can’t be in a public space.

Please don’t take my word for it though, if setting up a space for regular DIY shows, definitely do your own research into local council alcohol policy because especially if you get pestered by police, it pays to be informed. Smaller towns I imagine either won’t have a policy or won’t bother enforcing one, it’s only the larger cities which will often bother – some venues can get away for years without even a look, others get hassled within the first few weeks.

Don’t be afraid to talk to the police or council about this before setting up your space. You will not need to give your address of where you intend to host

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<sup>2</sup> [www.police.govt.nz](http://www.police.govt.nz)

<sup>3</sup> [www.teentools.co.nz](http://www.teentools.co.nz)

<sup>4</sup> [www.wellington.govt.nz](http://www.wellington.govt.nz)

<sup>5</sup> [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

parties. Firstly, there is NO point trying to sell or supply alcohol - you're just asking for trouble and it's not worth it. It doesn't matter if it's a private residence or not, if you're caught supplying alcohol to a minor (under 18) and you're not their parent or guardian, you can get nailed. However, somebody under 18 is able to consume alcohol on private property – it's the issue of how they got the alcohol that is the concern and as long as you're not responsible for that part, it's not a problem (other than of course the gigantic problem of underage drinking)

Contact your local police and ask for clarification on what it means to have a private event. Does an “RSVP” or ticket and no doorsales constitute a private event? Perhaps doing presales only or having an RSVP list at entry and a bouncer (doesn't need to be professional) making sure only those on the list enter is enough.

I mean, you could be a punk and put on the posters “You're personally invited”, and you could argue that anyone who then comes was “personally invited”, but of course being cheeky like this will only help in-the-moment, police would simply find something else to take you on for and be grumpy about your cheekiness. This is the problem, there is intentionally much ambiguity around the law so as to allow police ample power. I am fairly certain that this is on purpose so they can use their discretion to punish those parties which are flouting other issues and ignore those which are being run well and are under control. The police are not evil idiots, in all my dealings they're always reasonable and willing to discuss things – they only get pissed off if massive parties happen with young people spilling out into public areas obviously intoxicated, especially when they weren't given a heads up about the event. Having a sign outside the entry clearly saying “Private Event, Invite Only” might go some way to helping you argue it's a private event.

Most often police use the “Place of Resort” (Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012, Section 235) argument whereby if you have regular events which people attend and drink, police can pester you to stop or get a license, which paradoxically simply encourages more to drink which is what always happens when an unlicensed premise gains a license.

It's important not to get scared about the police. I believe the police can be as naïve about the law as most and they also tend to be sweet-as-much-of-the-time. I've always had good dealings and have been upfront. If you are holding an event and you don't have kids spilling out onto the street or tons of noise complaints, then you'll be ignored, another reason why it's important that your space has ample backyard and smoking areas. There should be absolutely minimal presence on the street, in-front of the house.

Don't let this put you off, successful DIY venues have operated in NZ for long periods of time with no issues. Running a DIY venue will not only be one of the most personally rewarding things you've ever done, but will make a gigantic and profound difference to the lives of many - through the bands you support by presenting a space for them to create really engaging performances, to the local community and young people you'll inspire.

Make a difference.

*Chapter 3*

**LIVE SCENES IN SMALL  
TOWNS ARE CLOSE TO  
NON-EXISTENT**



After the *A Low Hum* tours (2004-2007) I realised I had made a mistake. I thought that I had partly resolved the problem of not enough bands touring the smaller cities and towns of NZ. I had succeeded in touring bands that I liked, but after 2007 the amount of bands touring NZ's smaller towns decreased dramatically. I realised what I had done wrong and how I would do it differently if the opportunity arose.

In late 2007 I conducted an experiment in Wellington. I approached a venue (*MVP Bar*) that was slightly off-the-beaten-track, had zero record of live shows, no PA, no stage and no lighting. I offered to book/run shows there for three months so I could prove that a NZ venue could treat bands well and have great shows, starting from nothing. The vision was to have shows 3-4 nights a week, the PA and production was supplied free of charge to bands including engineers. Poster design, printing and plastering was paid for and organised by the bar as well. Bands got meals and decent riders. The plan was that the show wouldn't cost bands a single cent and they would take 100% of the door money (or get paid a guarantee).

It worked. Within three months *MVP Bar* had become a legitimate and successful live music venue, hosting four great shows a week. Only a few months after finishing my experiment and leaving the bar to their own devices, they fucked it up. Nobody booked shows there anymore and it died a quick death. This proved two things to me; it could be done BUT somebody has to monitor it full-time. I couldn't just create a document to tell the venue how to run successful shows, I'd have to watch over their shoulders.

Even though this was an important discovery, I was going overseas, so the project went on the back burner. Somebody should take over this job though, because it will work.

My ultimate vision was to find three venues/cafes/bars that didn't already host live music in the North Island and three in the South Island and to help them run one show per week. It would be like a club night (though not the kind where wannabe 'DJs' play 'indie' tracks on their *iPods*) but where every week on that

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_low\\_hum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_low_hum)

night, that venue always has a great show on.

It's no secret small towns struggle to retain their younger population, they tend to leave for work or study in larger towns and cities. This is why live music struggles in smaller towns, the main audience isn't there to support it. For any music fans left behind, the lack of venues showcasing quality music on a regular basis also means a scene can't get established. If shows are happening every single week and not just every-other-month, then suddenly there is a potential to really grow a community.

A permanent tour circuit needs to be established. For example in North Island: Palmerston North on Wednesday, Taupo on Thursday, Rotorua on Friday. Bands could then organise their own shows in Wellington and Auckland bookending those dates at whatever venues they want. Repeat this for the South Island, bookending Christchurch and Dunedin on either side. This is only one potential combo, the mix of towns/days is endless.

If you're in a smaller town and this sounds good perhaps you could get one venue in one town going, if so, the information below will totally apply. However, without being part of a regular tour circuit, it might be harder to get awesome bands that often.

Suck it up and make it work.

#### HOW TO DO IT

Obviously the first thing is find the appropriate venues. DIY venues would be ideal – and if already established could easily become part of the tour circuit, but let's assume for a moment that's not possible. The first place that springs to mind may not always be the best. You aren't looking for a 'live music venue' as such. You want a small, intimate, cool place that people enjoy hanging out at. You're better off with a licensed cafe that can clear a few tables and make room for 50-100 people than finding a big, dark, beer-stained room that fits 300. If it has decent foot traffic, even better.

The venue/cafe must be prepared to invest \$150 per week into the project. In return they will receive one night's entertainment every week, so this will be easy to sell. They should fairly easily recoup that cost over the bar/counter on those nights, but more importantly it'll bring in new patrons and they'll get weekly advertising (explained later). You'll need to explain to the venue that some nights are going to be better than others but the only way to really make the concept work is to see it through a minimum 3-6 months – it'll work.

The other part of the project is to find a reliable local to take care of everything (if this isn't you). This is the hardest part. If I were starting this from scratch, I would look for the good local bands, email the members and explain the project

and see who was keen to get involved – or maybe they have already read this book (saving you the effort to explain).

Of the \$150pw that the venue pays, \$100 of that (at most) goes to hiring a basic vocal PA and a couple of microphones. There are hire companies in every town and normally you're looking at \$150-\$200 per night depending on size and items. If you explain that you'll be hiring every week and they'll get advertising in return (explained later), they would be idiots to charge more than \$100 a show (if you collect/drop off) - if you can't find a PA company, you'll find a local band who will hire their practise PA for that easily. The other \$50 + 10% of the door take goes to your local supporter whose role is simple; design/layout/distribute a gig guide, liaise with the parties involved, mix the show (engineer) and have a flat where the band can crash.

So, you have your venue, PA, engineer, accommodation and flier delivery sorted. What next?

Either you or the local supporter meets with local businesses. Firstly: local copy centres. You are seeking sponsorship of a monthly gig guide (500 double-sided A3 B&W photocopies per month). This is nothing for a copy centre. It'll cost them stuff-all per month and in return you offer an advertising space on the gig guide and accompanying webpage/FB page. Also add that for any show that has extra budget for posterage, they will be your first point of call.

Secondly: local pizza company or similar. Independently owned is obviously best, otherwise a locally owned and operated franchise. All you are asking for is 2-3 large pizzas free one night per week. In exchange they get advertising on the gig guide / webpage.

These are two priority businesses to have involved, but the scope is endless. You can talk to local radio stations (commercial and independent), newspapers, tertiary institutions, local council (arts boards), record stores, etc. If you sell it as the community getting behind this regular event that stimulates live music in the town and gives youth something to do, I'm sure you'll receive epic amounts of support (especially in smaller towns).

Now, the gig guide. The easiest and coolest way to do this is to find one illustrator<sup>2</sup> for each month. They design/illustrate a black & white A3 poster separated into quarters, each quarter devoted to one week's listing. When you fold the A3 into quarters, each weeks show fills an A5 space. Choose awesome illustrators and make the posters collectable, something people want to hang in their flats. You could also crop one quarter and photocopy A5's if you want a flier for that particular week only.

This A3 poster will take up one side of the A3 photocopy. Keep it simple on the other side; perhaps a monthly editorial, interesting local art and here is where you put ads for all the businesses who are supporting you so far – pizza

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<sup>2</sup> [www.gigposters.com](http://www.gigposters.com)

company, the café, printers etc... and you have the potential to sell further ads. You could also profile the acts coming that month or preview the ones that are coming soon.

Design the layout so the gig guide works for all the participating cities and all you need to change for each town is the local business ads.

There you have it. The basic gist. You have a PA, a venue, an engineer, accommodation, food, advertising. Don't make the shows free. Make them \$10 so bands get some petrol money. If you're freaking out, make it \$5 to start with, but honestly if somebody has made the effort to get out of the house and come to your show they will pay \$10. Odds are you are doing this show in a town that isn't used to having shows (kinda the point) so if people bitch and moan about paying \$10, they can fuck off. What else are they gonna do?

Once the system is set-up. Trust me, you will NOT have a problem booking good bands. Getting free accom, food, playing shows in small towns with no risk, seriously... there will be no shortage of good bands keen to play. It's important to start with a strong offering in the first month or two. If the venues and supporters don't see some tangible results almost immediately they may get a little stressed, but yeah, don't worry, you'll have your pick.

This system can literally help 100s of bands a year. Most bands will want to tour with another act, so you'll generally get two touring per week in both islands. On the *A Low Hum* tours I could only tour 25-30 bands a year, and lost a tonne of money doing so. This system puts *A Low Hum* to shame, builds a sustainable live scene and shouldn't lose any money.

I am positive that the main reason that smaller towns can't attract decent sized audiences to see non-mainstream live music is not having regular enough events. People simply don't expect there to be anything good happening, so don't keep a look out, there aren't enough supportive locations/venues making sure regular events happen. If New Zealand had 100 Barrytown's (Population 225 – almost all of which come to shows there), which is not an impossible dream, then suddenly earning an income as a touring musician is a distinct reality.

There are endless ways to grow the plan year after year. You could bring more towns into the project, get more volunteers, look for sponsorship. Do you have any idea how many companies would kill to be involved with a project that presents 100's of shows a year? If you get this flowing right, there is no reason why the project couldn't easily sustain 10 shows a week (5 in each island) that's 500+ shows a year. I try to avoid sponsorship now, but there will be local and ethical brands around who just want to support in an altruistic sense.

While I don't doubt the hugeness of this project, I also think it's pretty simple. The reason people put off doing projects like this is they think they have to start as big as they intend to finish. Just remember, any good project starts small and grows to fit the demand. All you need is a little bit of nous and the guts to approach a dozen or so people to get it started.

You'll be responsible for implementing a concept revolutionary in NZ, and the world.

APRA AND PPNZ ARE RIPPING OFF NEW ZEALAND BUSINESSES IN THE NAME OF  
SONGWRITERS WHO HAVE NO IDEA THIS IS GOING ON

## *Chapter 4*

**APRA AND PPNZ ARE  
RIPPING OFF NEW  
ZEALAND BUSINESSES  
IN THE NAME OF  
SONGWRITERS WHO  
HAVE NO IDEA THIS IS  
GOING ON**

Maybe this all sounds like a conspiracy theory but *APRA*<sup>1</sup> & *PPNZ*<sup>2</sup> purposefully keep the public as well as music rights holders in the dark about their operation so as to directly benefit only a select few in the industry and more or less steal from everyone – from music rights holders through to mom and pop retailers. The operations of the industry can seem impenetrable and confusing, and this helps them get away with what they're doing.

In a nutshell, ANY time you hear music performed anywhere... in public spaces like bars, cafes, hair salons, retailers or synchronised with images like on TV and films, on airplanes, in churches, in cinemas anywhere, a fee needs to be paid to the owners of the music.

When you purchase a CD or pay for a digital download, it doesn't also give you the rights to broadcast that music publicly. Broadcasted music adds a lot of value to a business, for instance, background music played at a café adds aesthetic and ambiance to the experience, an experience enhanced by the music played, so the rights holders of said music should be compensated – to do this, “music users” (in this case, the Café) are charged fees by a royalty collection agency (In this instance, *APRA* and *PPNZ* operating as *OneMusic*<sup>3</sup>) on the premise that this fee is then distributed amongst the “appropriate” music rights holders (The artists and record labels)... but it's not.

When a song is broadcast publicly three groups of people need to get paid: the songwriter/s, the recording “owner”, and the performers on the recording (i.e. band members or session musicians). *APRA* collects 50% of the total fee to be paid to the songwriter/s. The other 50% is paid to *PPNZ* and mainly compensates the owner of the “master recording” whilst also dedicating a smaller portion to the performers. In the past owners of master recordings were typically record

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<sup>1</sup> [www.apra.co.nz](http://www.apra.co.nz)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ppnz.co.nz](http://www.ppnz.co.nz)

<sup>3</sup> [www.onemusic.co.nz](http://www.onemusic.co.nz)

labels (when recording an album actually cost a lot of money) but is now more often than not the recording artist.

*APRA* and *PPNZ* provide a wonderful service with a significant part of their business operation. When a song is played on radio or TV, home and abroad, it's these companies who chase music users and make sure they pay on the rights holders behalf, something that would be impossible for an individual songwriter to do – the fees collected by *APRA* and *PPNZ* reflect an important part of a musicians income, in some cases, the majority of their income – their collection of these royalties is a godsend and they do it efficiently and professionally - however, its only in these well documented cases (TV/radio/airlines etc...) that *APRA* and *PPNZ* do their job well, in almost every other area they're taking the piss – trading on thousands of songwriters to scratch the backs of a few.

In 2013 *APRA* and *PPNZ* came together and formed *OneMusic*, a one-stop licensing initiative that was designed to make things simpler for NZ business and provide them with a simple to understand single license with one company rather than previously having to attain two separate licenses. That's all fair enough, however, the system is so flawed it boggles my mind that anyone sees it as anything other than a gigantic slap in the face for music.

The following problems are echoed throughout the world in each country's own PRO (performance rights organisation) as the entire system is an abuse of power, but I'll detail specifically below why NZ is most fucked of all.

Each *OneMusic* contract<sup>4</sup> is specific to one area of music licensing, there are various fees over multiple sectors and I'll break some of these down later, however...I want to spend most of the time examining probably the most common license which applies to music played in restaurants, cafes, bars, music venues etc...

There are two types of music broadcasting these companies need to pay for. Background Music & Featured Music. "Background Music" is obvious, "Featured Music" is when you have a DJ performing, karaoke happening or a live band – something that people are coming specifically for as opposed to dining when music is an accompaniment in the background.

Background Music fees are determined by the size of the space you're playing music in - the minimum fee is for spaces 0-49m<sup>2</sup> – If you're a restaurant/cafe you're required to pay \$322 a year, pubs/bars at this size are \$402.50 per year. My bar *Puppies* is in the next bracket and would be required to pay \$517.50 per year. These fees go on a sliding scale up to venues 300m<sup>2</sup>+ (we're talking venues along the size of *Bodega* in Wellington, *Galatos* in Auckland etc.. who would be asked to pay \$1092.50 per year.

These amounts are if you don't just play the radio in your business (an

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<sup>4</sup> You can download a PDF of the Café/Hospitality license here (link accurate as of May 2014) <https://www.onemusicnz.com/media/4689/onemusic-hospitality.pdf>

important distinction) - if you just play the radio you pay 50% of these fees as radio stations are already paying fees to play the songs as well.

Contrary to what people may think, running a bar is not always a license to print money and these figures are nothing to be scoffed at. In principle I have no qualms at all with paying a license fee for background music, I think it's totally fair enough, it adds much value to my business and I wish to play some songs by artists who are represented by APRA. The problem? None of them are going to receive any of that money.

That is the first and most major of all the issues with background music fees. The money is, I don't say this lightly, demande<sup>5</sup>, from music users with it stated that "royalties are distributed back to appropriate music rights holders".

Online it goes one step further and states "APRA and PPNZ ensure that this license income is distributed back to the appropriate music rights holders". There are two very important words; *ensure*, meaning "to secure or guarantee" and *appropriate* meaning "belonging to or peculiar to a person". Now if you were a bar owner and you read that, paid your fee like a good kiwi and then played some albums to the public, you'd assume (and rightly so) that the artists in question would be paid out of that money you just paid.

Wrong.

Don't worry, this is not your fault, *OneMusic* rely on this fact to extract this money from everyone. When a business is signing a cheque to *OneMusic*, never are they thinking "Hmm... at no stage am I being asked what I'm playing. How is this money going to get to the right people?" They are simply thinking - "This business is telling me that when I pay this money, the right people will get paid, surely nobody would deliberately lie about that and take advantage of local businesses?"

*OneMusic* do not sample background music played in hospitality. They have one tired old method for determining who gets paid - they use the only figures available to them - sampling of local radio stations and they then pay songwriters/recording owners according to those figures.

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<sup>5</sup> After paying my fee in 2013, but not paying fast enough in 2014, I received a letter from lawyers representing *OneMusic* in March 2014 threatening legal action if my license wasn't completed within two weeks. Really appreciate the awareness of a maximum \$150,000 fine or 5 years imprisonment. I'm sure that wasn't meant to be intimidating. In the document from their solicitors, it once again reiterates their core (false) message about distributing to appropriate rights holders.



## BACKGROUND MUSIC

When a business plays background music this is very carefully considered. There will be a specific reason particular albums are played. The music you play sets the aesthetic and ambiance of your location. Perhaps you're a cliché café that plays kiwi reggae or surfer/songwriter pop, maybe you're an "edgy" hair salon that plays deep house and minimal techno, a crusty pub that plays nothing but dad rock from the 80s, perhaps you're a fashion retailer that plays k-pop and dubstep. Businesses usually make a very considered decision over what music to play in their environments, they usually choose specifically NOT to play the radio, so why are artists being paid as if they are?

*OneMusic* present a selection of quotes from local businesses on their website who mention why they play music, all of them basically stating more or less what I've said above.

*"We play all sorts of genres from lots of eras." – Fidels*

*"We think carefully about the music we play" – Rodney Wayne*

*"We put a big emphasis on NZ Music instore with no less than 50% NZ music at all times. ....and a bunch of older classics." – Hallensteins*

*"Music is vital in each of our stores to set the right environment and mood" – Recycle Boutique*

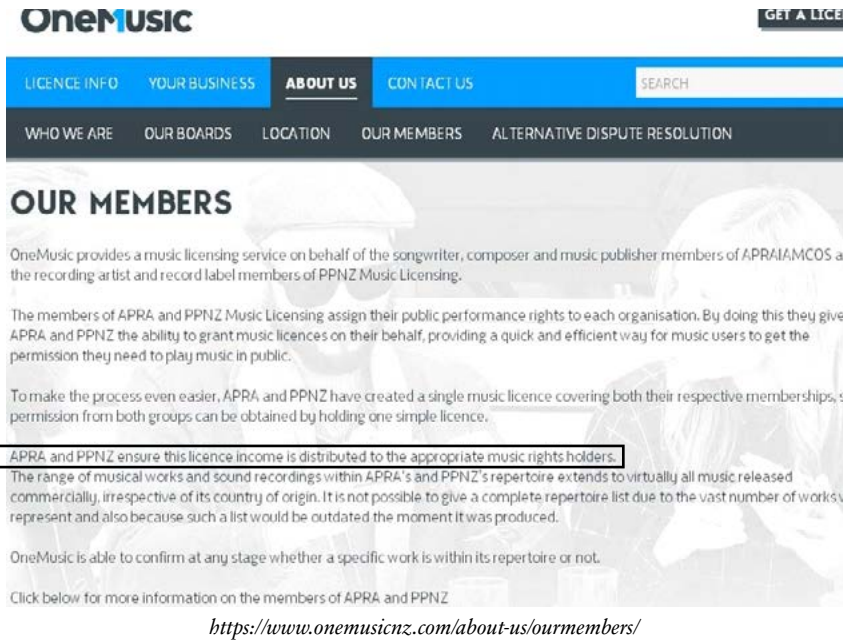
*"We play a wide range of genres, and to achieve our non-intrusive atmosphere we generally play relaxed, chilled, 'laid back' music." – Robert Harris*

*"do you get a lot of drinkers in the bar on a Friday? Crank up the beats, maybe play some 'classics' which will appeal to the age group" – Monsoon Poon*

All quotes taken from *onemusic.co.nz*

The statements condemning their very sampling technique is shoved right in our faces by the culprits themselves. Clearly, other than when cheeky staff take over the stereo and play their ipods, businesses make informed and deliberate decisions on what to play.

Just imagine how much cash *Robert Harris* are paying. There are around 50+ cafes throughout the country, now we're just talking ONE chain of ONE brand in ONE business sector, and if they're paying what they should we're talking minimum \$16k from that one company – It breaks my heart to think of all the chill and laid back music producers not getting their fair deal, but seriously, that's a considerable amount of money and we're not even scratching the surface, we're itching the surface's scab.



**OneMusic** GET A LICENCE

LICENCE INFO YOUR BUSINESS **ABOUT US** CONTACT US SEARCH

WHO WE ARE OUR BOARDS LOCATION OUR MEMBERS ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

## OUR MEMBERS

OneMusic provides a music licensing service on behalf of the songwriter, composer and music publisher members of APRA/AMCOS and the recording artist and record label members of PPNZ Music Licensing.

The members of APRA and PPNZ Music Licensing assign their public performance rights to each organisation. By doing this they give APRA and PPNZ the ability to grant music licences on their behalf, providing a quick and efficient way for music users to get the permission they need to play music in public.

To make the process even easier, APRA and PPNZ have created a single music licence covering both their respective memberships, so permission from both groups can be obtained by holding one simple licence.

**APRA and PPNZ ensure this licence income is distributed to the appropriate music rights holders.**

The range of musical works and sound recordings within APRA's and PPNZ's repertoire extends to virtually all music released commercially, irrespective of its country of origin. It is not possible to give a complete repertoire list due to the vast number of works represented and also because such a list would be outdated the moment it was produced.

OneMusic is able to confirm at any stage whether a specific work is within its repertoire or not.

Click below for more information on the members of APRA and PPNZ

<https://www.onemusicnz.com/about-us/ourmembers/>

In small print on documents downloaded from their site, *OneMusic* elaborate a little on their distribution of money methods with the following text “APRA tries whenever possible to ensure that license fees received from each user are paid directly to the musical works performed or broadcast by that user, if it is economically feasible to do so”

Hold on a second! That seems quite different to the “APRA and PPNZ ensure this license income is distributed to the appropriate music rights holders” as declared in all their principle propaganda.

All those caveats written in above, “whenever possible” and “if it is economically feasible to do so” are only discovered if wading through boring as hell documents downloaded from the APRA website, in this instance, from page 5 of *APRA distribution practises*<sup>6</sup>. Nowhere does it say anything like that on the contract NZ businesses are given, even the fine print on back of the contract doesn’t elaborate on their key line about distributing to *appropriate* people. See what I mean about deliberately keeping people in the dark?

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.apra-amcos.co.nz/downloads/file/about/APRA-Distribution-Practices.pdf>

The only real mention of this glaring issue is on the PPNZ website (not *OneMusic*) who in their FAQ have the following:

*WHY IS RADIO DATA USED TO DISTRIBUTE PUBLIC PERFORMANCE INCOME?*

*It would be unworkable and unfair to ask many businesses using music (such as cafes, bars, shops etc.) to keep manual logs of all the music they play.*

*The best proxy (or reflection) of the music these licensees use is radio logs from commercial music radio stations. PPNZ does however review its distribution methodology from time to time and is always looking for practical and effective ways to gather as accurate as possible data on music use.*

Why is it “unworkable” and “unfair” to ask businesses? Shouldn’t businesses at least be told what they are paying for and where those funds are going? According to PPNZ they “review their methodology from time to time” – though this practise has been in place for as long as they’ve been collecting with no sign of changing, unless enough of us kick up a stink now?

In the last several months while thinking about this piece I’ve been taking special note of any music I hear played in public spaces like cafes, or retailers I visit - I’m never hearing radio hits, granted I’m not going into *Glassons*, but I’ve been visiting many places and current 2014 radio hits is not what I’m hearing.

I’ll come back to this issue later, but I want to quickly run down some other issues with the “Background Music” license.

I’ll use my bar, *Puppies*, as a case study for much of below, simply because, well, its easy.

All bars which play background music are subject to the same fees even though the time they play background music varies greatly. I.e: in 2014, my bar is open on average 8 hours a week. Fridays and Saturdays from 9pm-1am. During those hours we have live performance happening (which also is meant to be paid for – more on that soon) so my time to play background music is limited, on average I play 2 and ¼ hours of music each night, that’s 4 and a ½ hours per week. Most bars in Wellington are open Monday-Sunday either 3pm to late or those that have proper bar food open through lunch from 11am to late. Either way you’re talking an average of 50-80 hours per week and they’ll be playing background music the whole time they’re open. Several music venues operate similarly to me, opening only very limited hours and playing music only between acts.

Over the course of a year a normal bar might play 3380 hours of music, at \$517.50 per year that’s 15 cents per hour. Live music venues that open limited hours like mine might play 234 hours of music a year or \$2.20 per hour, fourteen times more than a normal “drinking” bar, café or restaurant. Is this fair?

Fees for event licenses (more on those later) are worked out by taking into

account the number of people listening to the music and also the duration of musical works performed during the hours of the event, how is it SO different for live music venues when we are simply running events indoors?

In some countries, record stores are one of the few businesses which play music who are exempt from paying fees, this is because it is generally accepted that they are always playing music with the intention of selling it, therefore offering the musician an income and exposure. In NZ however, this is not the case, and record stores are hit up just like any other retailer. I've talked to a few music retailers and though it seems most have been ignored, I certainly uncovered some who have been pestered. Do the musicians registered with APRA know that local record stores (to say that these businesses are not making money hand over fist is fairly obvious) are being hit up to pay fees to play music to sell their albums? And in their name?

Funnily enough, ASCAP in the US who are the absolute devil<sup>7</sup> when it comes to a PRO, do offer an exemption for record stores. Shouldn't a live music venue be granted a similar exemption if they are playing music of artists playing at the venue, or likely to play at the venue? Isn't it the very same thing? I am not trying to personally get out of paying the fee, I'm just highlighting how vastly different background music is at a *music venue* compared to a *bar*, so why being lumped in the same category is offensive.

Not only are the fees unfairly positioned against *live music venues*; the only bars actually promoting the music scene -but none of the fees paid will make its way back to the artists played anyway since there is no sampling being done.

Lets move on to some of the other ways in which *OneMusic* are being jerks. The minimum fee for background music played in "the workplace" is \$100 per annum. This is for example if you have a retailer who might have a workshop out the back with a couple of staff manufacturing or whatever. A \$100 fee so a couple of people can listen to music on a small stereo, that is ridiculous in itself, but where it really gets insane, and APRA have been known to push this point, is that if there is even a remote possibility of people out the "front" in the retail part of a store hearing spillage of music being played by employees out the back room, they are forced to pay the minimum fee for background music in retail which is \$287.50. So there you go, a couple of staff members want to play some music (which in all likelihood they may have purchased legally) and to do so, the business is required to pay \$387.50 a year. When you add to this, that once again, this music is not monitored or sampled and will never makes its way back to the artists responsible, well, it's insane.

I could go on and on about the various industries and how background music fees are unfair and exorbitant, but it's all irrelevant anyway since there is no reporting going on so none of the money will be getting to the right place,

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.woodpecker.com/writing/essays/royalty-politics.html>

so even a fee of \$1 is unfair. I'll move on to some other faults of *OneMusic/APRA* now.

*APRA* are smart. They know how sketchy their business model is. All over the world *PRO's* (performance rights organisations) have the same dodgy process of money collection and are branded as crooks and gangsters, so they spend a bunch of money on looking like good guys. Through offering grants and putting on events they appear to be supporters of the music scene, but wait a sec, whose money is this they're using? They're taking money extorted from businesses (in many cases small/struggling) on the guise of paying it back to musicians responsible but using some of those fees to stage overly lavish events or offer funding opportunities for people?

Funnily enough, I was the recipient of one of these grants, back in 2003 when I was doing my *A LOW HUM* tours and hitting a wall financially I was looking into every funding avenue possible, I had no idea what *APRA* even did back then, didn't care, just saw I might be able to get some \$\$\$ from them, which I did, from memory between \$1-3000. Well, when I discovered later that I was taking money that should have been paid out to songwriters (even if it was interest earned), I felt kinda crap – when I realised later still that the money probably would have just gone to those at the top of the food chain and not actually deserving of it, well, I stopped feeling shit.

*APRA* present numerous awards in addition to their pompous *Silver Scrolls* ceremony – really, is there even a point to this show? Can't you just tally votes and announce the "winner" online, do you really need to spend money on an overly lavish, alienating, joke of a ceremony celebrating ONE song?

Other awards *APRA* sponsor include *The Hospitality Awards for Excellence* "Best Entertainment venue", *The Lewisham Awards*, *The Rotorua Hospitality Awards* "Outstanding Restaurant", *New Zealand Fitness Awards* "Sight and Sound" and *The Hackman Theatre Awards* "best singing in a play". They have a bunch of other awards too and give away three "professional development awards" at \$12,000 each along with faffing around with the *New Zealand Music Hall of Fame*.

Curiously, I can't find the line on the contract saying "APRA fees are distributed to the appropriate rights holders and used to fund lavish parties, sponsor unnecessary provincial awards, and provide scholarships and funding".

*APRA* and me didn't really cross paths until 2008. Even though I'd received that funding from them in '03, I really had no idea what it was about. In 2008 after the second *Camp A Low Hum* wrapped up, an event which ended up losing a little bit of money due to some damages at the event, and though some fundraising helped fix some of that, I was still down – not to mention still largely in debt from the first event where I'd had to borrow \$15k to pay everyone.

So there I am, satisfied about another great event, yet bummed as I'm still in debt when I get this letter from *APRA* telling me that I owe *them* money. Not aware of this before the event and in total confusion about it, it's worked out I

owe them around \$2k. The money doesn't come from profits (of which there were clearly none), but from a percentage of overall gate sales. So here I was, pretty bummed out already about being in debt, and yay, here's some more debt for ya!

I'm angry at myself for submitting blindly to *APRA* for so many years. I would keep asking to see some sort of record of where the money goes, how much is being paid to whom etc, but they would always tell me they couldn't do so. I paid them.

Naively I assumed being that the bands were filling in live returns and submitting these to *APRA* that well, the bands would be getting paid fairly. Who knows? *APRA* won't tell me. MANY (probably, most) of the bands who have played *Camp* have never received a cent of that money.

From the little I've extracted from bands over the years when I've taken a look at bands whose only set was at *Camp*, well, the money doesn't seem to work out. I've never understood why I didn't just get a report from *APRA* showing me where the money went. Surely it is just a matter of exporting a spreadsheet? There must be some sort of payment allocated to *Camp A Low Hum* assigned to particular songs? They can then just export a document showing me a total of all payments made from *Camp A Low Hum* – and yeah, I understand a fair admin fee should be extracted too.

What happens to the money from songs that don't get reported? Bands who don't fill in forms? Year after year I'd ask to see some fair reporting. I don't get why not. Is it standard procedure for businesses to demand money on behalf of others and then not actually show you that they're paying it? Doesn't that sound like "protection money" or something a gangster would do?

If they haven't been entering in the information to make it possible to generate a report for me, what are the admin fees even for? Time spent organising their parties? Design time on their irrelevant publications?

Obviously their "Background Music" fees are a joke, but what about these other fees I mentioned, "Featured Music Per Day". Bare with me here, this is even more nuts.

#### FEATURED MUSIC

If you're a venue that has music take place in any form other than background music, say you might have a DJ perform, karaoke, live original music, improv jazz, covers bands – whatever, if the music is featured you need to pay a daily fee to *APRA*. For a small venue like mine the fee to present a live band is \$12.75 per day, for a larger 400 capacity venue the fee is around \$18.40 per day, for DJs it's about an extra \$5 per day on top of those numbers. These fees are not paid for by

the promoter of the show, but by the venue.

Let's do a case study on a largish venue, say a *Kings Arms* in Auckland, or a *Bodega* in Wellington. Venues like these are aiming really to do 4-5 nights of live music per week, each night they'll be required to pay the \$18.40 plus their background music fee of \$1092.50. At an average of four nights of entertainment per week, that's a yearly bill of \$4919.70. WTF?!

Let's take a further look at that. On most nights these venues would have 3-4 bands play each bill, let's pretend for a second that the money the venue pays actually gets back to the bands (less 15% admin), that would be \$15.64, lets spread that between three acts, \$5.21 an act, let's assume that on average there were two songwriters per band on average splitting the money and they were all playing original songs. That's each songwriter on a given evening, pretty much best case scenario might make \$2.60... the actual way this is worked out is obviously taking in account songs and duration, but for sake of argument, it would end up around this figure anyway, best case.

So, a songwriter performs in their band at one of these venues who are staring at a \$5000 bill, and they'll make enough to purchase half a cup of coffee. Anyway, this is only the tip of the iceberg.

OK, so, venues are asked to pay this money every night they have live performance. There is an assumption (from APRA) that songs registered with APRA (and international affiliates) are being played every night – other than this making me angry as it is APRA implying that they “own” music and that nobody is playing music not on their books, it's just plain wrong.

As local music venues we're constantly having nights with up and coming originals bands, not simply as support acts, but as whole line-ups – bands who haven't even recorded any songs yet, let alone thought about signing up with APRA. What about improv groups? Noise? Bands playing traditional or public domain music? Between the vast number of bands playing songs not registered and the large amount of bands playing music that can't be registered - the amount of bands slipping through the gaps is huge.

What doesn't make sense about all this is that *OneMusic* demand you pay in advance, but bands are required to fill in paperwork showing what songs they played at what venue on what date etc anyway – if the information is being collected and registered with APRA anyway, Why are venues asked to pay in advance on the off-chance something might be played. Let me explain that.

Lets say APRA ask a venue to pay that \$4919.70 in advance for a year of shows. That money is sitting there, earning interest, paid in advance.

When it comes time for bands to do their live performance returns, they fill in forms and list the songs they played and the date and at what venue. This is done once a year in November – they then register this with APRA and get paid out a short while after. So what happens to all the money that's not claimed by bands who played? Just like their other income streams it goes into a pool, gets

paid out to the most played artists on radio/TV etc...

If the information is being collected anyway by *APRA*, why not just invoice the venues directly for the bands who do fill in the paperwork – or at the very least, once we pay the amount, show us where the money is going?

Some venues in NZ have already taken the lead on this and just take *APRA* fees straight from the ticket sales, which is just plain ridiculous. Collecting \$18.40 from the bands on the night, then making the bands fill in some paperwork - waiting a year and then hopefully getting some of it back – if they're lucky. It's hilariously inefficient. A system put into place when covers bands ruled the roost and when songs were being played that weren't written by the performers most of the time – and it's still the same system now.

My favourite part of these fees though is the absolute randomness of how they arrived at these figures and how they fail to take into account what everybody else in the industry knows.

Let's compare a small venue like mine with a larger venue like a *Bodega* or *The Kings Arms*.

I have a capacity of 144 and am required to pay \$12.75 per show. *Bodega* has a capacity of 500+ and would be required to be paying \$18.40 per show. Say we both have shows at \$10 per head and sell out. My fee is .08% of the doortake, *Bodega's* is .03%. How does that make sense? Smaller venues, which are less likely to even have artists playing songs registered with *APRA* anyway are paying a higher percentage. Are we being punished for being small?

Also, why is the figure the same regardless of the amount of people who come to the show. I am pretty sure most live music venue owners would agree that in any given month of say 16 shows, 1-2 of those will sell out 4-5 of them will get 60-70% attendance 4-5 will get 40-50% and 3-4 around 20-30% maybe 1-2 like 10%.

Every bar is going to have some epic failures, I've had shows with less than 10 people in attendance, but according to this, I'd still be required to pay \$12.75? A night where I've already lost hundreds in staff costs, production costs, overheads and took in no money over the bar, yet was rad to the band all night, still gave them some free beers, lent them some gear and didn't charge venue hire, and now...what, I gotta pay *APRA* \$13 for the privilege?

It's one of the reasons some venues will charge venue hire, but rather than charging specifically the \$10-20 in *APRA* fees, they'll round it upto \$50 and cream a little....so something that *APRA* think is doing the bands a service and collecting money for them could end up ripping them off.

But like with the Background Music fees, I'm not being a whiny dick about having to pay these fees, I think it's important, even more so in this day and age where musicians incomes are being pillaged at every turn to pay respect to copyright and to pay these fees, is a paper trail too much to ask? Is it also too much to ask that my money not go to some radio hit already rolling in cash when it could go to the artist who actually played at my bar?



APRA AND PPNZ ARE RIPPING OFF NEW ZEALAND BUSINESSES IN THE NAME OF  
SONGWriters WHO HAVE NO IDEA THIS IS GOING ON

WHAT CAN WE DO?

It's a monopoly out there, and though there is nothing stopping another company starting in competition to *APRA* (The US have three companies offering such a service), in reality, that is unlikely.

MUSIC USERS

If you are asked to purchase a license from *OneMusic* for broadcasting music, question them. I've made it quite clear to them (even with the threat of legal action) that I am no longer going to pay fees for anything unless I either see exactly where the money is going and that it's going to the correct license holders or they'll allow me to report what I play and pay accordingly and then they show me that they're paying out as per those reports. This is completely fair to ask.

MUSIC RIGHTS HOLDERS

Ask *APRA/PPNZ* why they pester businesses in your name. Why a record store is threatened with legal action IN YOUR NAME for playing your music. Why a music venue is threatened with legal action IN YOUR NAME for playing your music. Let them know that you're unhappy with that (unless you're not of course).

Of course they'll explain that they can't make exceptions, because, where do you draw the line? Well, the line is fairly obvious – if selling music is a primary source of a business's income (ie: record stores, live music venues) then they should have the rights to play music in order to promote and sell music and performances on behalf of those songwriters.

The saddest thing for me about all this malarkey? It's not the harassment of local business, it's not using the name of songwriters to abuse their support network, it's not even the complete neglect of trying to direct funds to the right people and implying they do – typically, it's the complete lack of foresight of a sector of the industry to see what's right in front of their noses could drastically improve the entire musical spectrum in NZ and not making an effort to do anything.

As I discuss in other essays in this book, the predominant problem with creating a career in NZ music is the lack of access to the population, this is hindered greatly by our lack of broadcast opportunities. Commercial radio in NZ is dismal to say the least, the days of having a "breaking/bridge" radio network like *Channel Z*, who were a station in the early 00's who took songs from the underground/hits on student radio and took them that next step by playing to a significantly larger audience leading them to get their attention on the mainstream networks is long gone. We're left with networks who are not interested in breaking new artists and genre focused or a student network who struggle to get enough of a foothold with any population to really make big

enough impression on the market. KiwiFM doesn't even count – I still don't understand the point of that station. Ghettoising locally produced music and lumping it all together as if it's not good enough to stand on its own. Don't get me started.

#### WHAT WE COULD BE DOING

**W**hy isn't the NZ music industry utilising and putting as much effort into promoting music played in public spaces as they do with their focus on commercial radio?

*McDonalds* have 160 stores in New Zealand. I know that many of those will be in foodcourts etc and not able to participate in what I'm discussing, but let's pretend for a minute these are all individual stores (haha, it makes my argument stronger). Those 160 stores are responsible for serving around 1 million people per week, this is nearing over three times the broadcast reach of the entire *Edge* radio network. Let's say that these *McDonald's* have an average floor space of upto 200metres squared (many will be much larger) – this would result in a yearly payment of around \$96,000 in licensing fees – so that is one part of the story, what about the missed opportunity from the New Zealand music industry to be involved with the programming of what is playing in *McDonalds* around the country? So much focus is put on radio...what about everywhere else people can hear music. In petrol stations, in malls, retail... everywhere. Why aren't systems in place where assistance is given to these companies to promote and sell music as opposed to be put off playing it because of high fees? I am pretty sure *KFC* used to have a deal with *Juice TV* (I swear every *KFC* I went into was playing *J2* – certainly *Elton John* and *Shania Twain* would have been doing well out of that) – Couldn't we instead USE these avenues for music promotion?

Petrol stations usually even sell CDs. Shouldn't they be considered not only a nationwide broadcasting medium, but a music retail opportunity as well? A system where people visiting can easily find out what they are listening to and purchase if they desire should be implemented?

Terrestrial radio seems to have a limited future. It's based on advertising revenue which may eventually dry up as advertisers migrate to cheaper and better targeted online advertising.

The jukebox was a perfect idea for the time. An accurate way of keeping track of song play, of promoting albums and providing an "add on" to local business and in some cases a passive income. A modern day virtual jukebox is what is needed, funnily enough, it's already here. *Spotify* anyone? Now I know that stuff all money makes it back to the actual license holders, but something is better than nothing right?

Imagine rather than businesses having to pay a \$600 a year fee to play music

of which none of it went anywhere, they instead for that same amount of money bought a basic netbook and a premium *Spotify* (or similar) account. That netbook was actually set up facing the customer. Songs/albums are selected and broadcast over that particular system. If a customer likes what they hear all they need to do is glance at the screen to see what is currently playing.

There are many ways in which you could improve on this – a way of displaying the information in a software hack could be made so it was more streamlined and presented simply the album cover and name of record playing and information displayed for how people can purchase such music.

Sure, this idea is a little impractical, but it fixes many issues. Makes sure music played gets back to at least the majority of the rights holders, takes on an issue of the lack of radio broadcast opportunities and presents another way of promoting music (local or not).

At the end of the day, this system is bound to get abused in any big chains with payola type incentives from the major labels so basically the same music get played anyway – but it's ALL those small companies on the fringe that together add up to make a massive market where this will really make a difference.

Though, this is not about me and my buddies. My main problem with this is on behalf of all those businesses in NZ who don't know any better, who have no idea where the money is going.

*OneMusic*, incorporating *APRA* and *PPNZ* needs a massive restructure. We live in an age where everything is trackable, there is no excuse for not being able to implement systems which ensure accurate and fair distribution of licensing fees over all sectors. The software and hardware that make this possible are readily available and saying "it's too difficult" is no longer adequate. There is no way of defending asking a business for money and then giving to those of your choice under the guise of paying others. The current system is flawed beyond belief and needs a total overhaul – as a music user or music creator, you can take part in this by challenging them on their collection practices and ethics.

*Chapter 5*

**THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH  
ALL AGES SHOWS**

There is a huge lack of good all-ages (AA) shows in NZ. DIY venues are great for AA shows. However a potential problem with DIY is that although they are technically open to all-ages, kids<sup>1</sup> don't feel welcome at them, are scared of going to them or they are simply too late in the evenings. That's why 'conventional' AA shows are still important.

When I first started putting on shows I put on a handful of AA shows. But it wasn't until a show in Christchurch in '05<sup>2</sup> that I realised just how important it was when I saw it directly influence the entire music scene. It seemed that all the best bands that spewed forth over the next few years in Christchurch all had members who had attended that one show. Inspired by that show I did 60-70 more AA shows over the next few years.

There have been some significant boosts in the AA show movement over the last decade including Will Edmonds/*Out of Kilter* shows at *The Penthouse. Creation* in Christchurch – though I only realised years later given the name that the venue probably had some pretty serious religious overtones, Craig Black and the legendary *Stomach* in Palmerston North, *Savvy Promotions'* shows in Auckland and not to mention various great house party BYO venues that have come and gone.

So, you want to do an AA show. What do you do? Well, unfortunately AA shows are usually expensive to put on. Luckily bands are often happy to play for free so it works out.

Make sure you can afford to lose money. If you're a cry baby and can't bear losing money, do something else. Buy the newest games console or something just as pointless and numb the pain of your boring existence. If you'd prefer to take a risk and do something that benefits more than just yourself, read on.

The ideal scenario is finding a venue where you don't need to change the license.

Liquor licensing can be pretty confusing. Some venues have club licenses which means they can serve alcohol *and* have people of any age on premises as long as it's 'members only', people who come to a show there may have to sign a register upon arrival.

There are licensed venues, like theatres, cafes and restaurants which can have "undesignated areas" whom can serve alcohol and have people under age onsite without guardians. You could look into the various types of license in your

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<sup>1</sup> Apologies for my excessive use of the word 'kids' in this section; I'm not being patronising, it's just an easy word to group people under 18.

<sup>2</sup> So So Modern and TeenWolf, *Creation*. Sept 2005.

district and the venues that have them. This may include a meeting with your local councillor or liquor licensing representative at your council and ask them about it. The benefit of having a show happen at one of these locations which is licensed and can have young people onsite is that you can do true “all ages” shows, not just the terrible kiwi interpretation which is “under 18s only”.

The more popular (alcohol free) options are either hiring a community hall (you’ll need some money for a bond) or talking to a unlicensed cafe and having it outside of their regular hours. I’ve done this a couple of times and it works well. They’ll usually make enough money to warrant staying open and more importantly it’s free advertising; they’ll probably get people into their cafe who haven’t been there before and those new customers will associate a good connection with that cafe having seen a great show there. Seriously, when you explain that to a cafe owner, they will jump.

Community hall hire can range from the cheaper end of the scale of \$50-\$100 through to \$400. Your local council website should have details for halls available for hire. Scout<sup>3</sup> halls are also a great option. They’re usually cheaper than community halls and have less red tape. You usually have to hire by the hour, so allow enough time to set-up and pack down.

With most of these scenarios you will need to source a PA (soundsystem for the bands). Ask around, odds are you can find one for free (from the more “professional” of local bands). Worse case scenario, you’ll pay \$1-300 to hire (a basic) one. You may also need other things like security or porta-loos. Make room in your budget for these if you need to. I’d suggest a fairly appropriate budget for an AA show including venue, PA, security (professional companies are usually around \$25 per hour), some advertising and cleaning fees would be around \$700. If you and a few friends go in together and share the risk, this isn’t much – and can set in place a really exciting future.

Once you have a PA and venue, book your bands. Almost any band is happy to do an AA show. They know it’s expensive to do them so they’re generally happy to play for free... if the show doesn’t make any money. Though you should definitely pay them (split the money from the door between the bands after costs have been covered) if you do make money.

Make sure the bands you talk to will work through the PA you’ve organised and you have a skilled person to run the PA. If you have only lined up a little vocal PA with no sub (bass speaker) and only two vocal microphones don’t be asking bands who have four vocalists and a pile of synths. I mean, I’ve mixed So So Modern (3 vox, 2 guitars, drums, 3 synths) many times around NZ through ridiculously inadequate vocal PAs, so it can be done in a pinch, but don’t be surprised if your little PA shifts itself trying to run that many inputs.

For your first shows, keep it simple. Find out what PA gear you have in

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<sup>3</sup> [www.scouts.org.nz](http://www.scouts.org.nz)

advance and let the bands know what to expect (how many mics/stands, how many channels in the mixer, etc). If you're running vocals through the mixer and book regular guitar/bass/drums-based bands, well, that is simple as. As soon as you start getting acts with electronic elements, suddenly PA headroom (volume) and monitoring (how the bands hear themselves) becomes more important.

The real trick with making a successful AA show is marketing. Currently there is no centralised way for kids to find out about AA shows. For an R18 show, sometimes all you need is a few A3 posters, gig guide listings and a *Facebook* event. For AA shows, you have to cast your promo net much wider.

With my old *A Low Hum* tours I used social media (back then, *Myspace*) to find young people keen to be involved – I would then send these kids a few posters each month to stick up at their school and I'd also send a press release around some local key schools (ie: the local liberal mufti schools) and ask them to put a note in their newsletters. On occasion I also sent a poster with a polite letter to the HOD of applicable high school music departments

Now, there are a few obvious rules you just don't mess with when putting on AA shows. First up, have the show on a Friday night. Kids often go away for the weekend on Saturdays and also, if it's on Friday you can get the kids buzzing about it at school that day and it's fresh in their minds. By Saturday they may have forgotten or been distracted. Secondly, you gotta have the show during school term. Putting on a show during school holidays is VERY hard. Also, work very hard on getting some actual school aged kids to support the bands, this is an immeasurable help in getting people along to the show and in a not so selfish way, helps a band get vital real world experience.

The best time for AA shows is June-October. At the start of the year kids are still making friends and not confident about going out to parties yet. Also, a lot of kids will only be just getting into music through their new friends, joining bands and the *The Smokefree Rockquest* plays a MAJOR part of getting kids excited about music.

*Rockquest* heats are usually around May of each year. If you want to get lots of kids to your shows, work around the *Rockquest*. One of the major improvements of *Rockquest* in recent times is their encouragement of kids to play shows outside of school, set up online profiles and be more professional. It means that finding good young bands has gotten easier and easier, and fuck, these bands are getting better and better. Through the *Rockquest* website you might find links to local young bands (if not links, at the very least they'll list the competitors so you can search them out online). Find the choicest ones and invite them to play, they'll be stoked! Be aware they might have no idea of show etiquette and turn up with absolutely no gear. Explain clearly what they need to do bring; no offence to young bands with their shit together but trust me, haha, I've had many a young

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<sup>4</sup> [www.smokefreerockquest.co.nz](http://www.smokefreerockquest.co.nz)

band turn up and have to borrow everything, including guitars.

Obviously *The Rockquest* isn't the only way to find young people playing music, more and more often kids under 18 are forming kick ass bands<sup>5</sup> and starting to play shows in the music scene. The act who played most at my bar Puppies during its entire lifespan was under 18 years of age.

It's a great idea to find *two* local school-aged bands to support, all their friends will turn up to watch them (instant audience). Keep in mind that they might only have a 12-15 minute set prepared but not being subject to all the trappings that musicians fall into as they grow older, young bands can change over in 3-4 minutes. In many ways, they are DREAM support acts. Two young bands can often both play sets and changeover in the space of 30 minutes.

Obviously the most direct advertising is having the young support bands sticking up posters at their school and telling their friends about it. Have them help make event pages on *Facebook* or whatever social networking site is cool at the time you are reading this is also supremely important.

The best methods for spreading the word to kids changes really fast. During my busiest year of AA shows (2006), *Myspace* was pretty useless at the start. By July, it was my main vehicle for advertising with just about every kid in NZ on it. By the end of the year they were already starting to move on. By mid-2007 the wheels had totally fallen off. That's why it's important to make connections and relationships with the local kids who really care. In 2006 there were a dozen kids around the country who used to help me heaps with shows. Some of those kids are still coming to my events now.

The only thing I found disheartening about AA shows is that I grew really fond (not in a pedophilic way) of many of the regular kids though their attitudes and personalities change so much at that age. I saw some kids turn into jaded pricks or think they were too cool for school. Some guys would only come when girls were there. And then there's the dumb kids who didn't give a fuck about the show and just wanted to be where the other kids were. But for every annoying kid there are ten awesome kids who will make you realise what you're doing is important. I've had emails five years after the fact to thank me for making that time in their life so much more enjoyable.

<sup>5</sup> Though old news now, in 2010, a great compilation was released highlighting the talent in NZ under 18 years of age at the time. *Pressure to Be* on *Papaiti Records* <http://papaiti.com/compilation> – members from almost all those bands are very active in the music scene today.



*Chapter 6*

**THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY  
USES THE MUSIC  
INDUSTRY TO FURTHER  
DOMINATE ITS PRESENCE  
AND INFLUENCE OVER  
YOUTH CULTURE**

New Zealanders have very little self control when it comes to drinking. Often when I'm at pub shows in NZ I feel like I'm back at secondary school with inexperienced and annoying drunk teenagers instead of adults. The regular displays of vomiting, fighting, stumbling around and being obnoxious can be really embarrassing, seriously, as a nation we (you) drink too much.

I bet you're thinking, "Nah, it's not me, it's those Courtney Place / Viaduct / Octagon / Victoria Street dicks that have a problem. I got my shit sorted!" You're wrong.

The NZ government seems to think that uber-taxing booze is going to change our attitude to drinking. Cheap booze in the USA and less abuse (from what I've witnessed first hand) shows that price is not a determining factor. The Government also thinks the legal drinking age has something to do with it, and keep threatening to change it. We all know most young NZers start drinking well before they're legal and don't have any problems gaining access to alcohol. So what's it about? Why are NZers adamant that getting drunk is cool when you're young, and when you're older – the done thing.

I get that people enjoy drinking and getting drunk. I do too (on occasion) but most of us act like children when it comes to booze. I overhear kiwis talking about their drinking prowess all the time and it's so embarrassing. God, just shut up, have some drinks and enjoy the band. I was at a house party recently and a dude in a band asked a guy to pick him up a *Coke* from the dairy, another friend told him to "man up". I wanted to punch the 'friend'...

There are many theories on how we ended up this way. Historically, in NZ & AUS the early closing laws (six o'clock swill) and an oppressive, macho, rugby-obsessed culture are the prime culprits. Despite these causes disappearing/diluting over the years, the madness continues. Then when young Kiwis & Aussies finally do get overseas 'for an experience', they go to London, live with other Kiwis/Aussies and drink copiously, because that's what everyone else seems to be doing.

## THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY USES THE MUSIC INDUSTRY TO FURTHER DOMINATE ITS PRESENCE OVER YOUTH CULTURE

Music and booze have become intrinsically linked. We've handed the live music industry over to the liquor companies.

It's difficult putting on all ages shows, and when you do most people over 18 wouldn't be caught dead there because they've been taught their whole life that booze is what you drink when you're an "adult".

We're almost entirely limited to putting on events in bars – It seems that the thought of watching bands without a drink in their hand scares the fuck out of most people.

When I used to do two shows in one day (AA show 6pm, R18 show 10pm) I'd see kids who JUST turned 18 switch over to the R18 shows even though all their friends were still going to the AA shows. They'd just be standing alone looking depressed at the R18 show, but with a beer in their hands.

One of the most eye-opening experiences of my life was in 2007 when I had the honour of touring *Fugazi*'s Ian Mackaye with his new band *The Evens*. He cared more than anybody I've ever toured and would call me from the USA regularly to find out about the venues I booked and how things were shaping up. His attention to detail was incredible. Not only were all shows to be all-ages, but they also had to be in venues where booze was never sold. As well as low stages and a connection with the audience, he wanted the environment to be nothing like a pub.

I could understand wanting only all-ages shows, but his insistence on a totally liquor-free zone or even a venue that felt like it could be a bar was frustrating. It wasn't until he arrived in NZ and we bro'd down that I understood his way of thinking.

Being around someone like Ian Mackaye is hard work. I was on the back foot the minute he spotted the 'McDonalds VIP' (free French Fries with Drive-Thru orders) sticker on my windshield, and he wasn't afraid of letting me know about it.

When we finally relaxed and talked frankly, the next few days were perhaps the most enlightening in my life. It became crystal clear that Ian wanted nothing to do with the alcohol industry and that he'd seen it take over the music scene in the USA. He wanted people to see music outside of a world infiltrated by liquor. Until then I'd only done all-ages shows in an altruistic sense, bringing music to kids. I'd been ignorant of the liquor industry's total domination of the music scene.

The liquor industry owns the music industry – this isn't just a flippant comment. How often do you go and see a band not at a bar or environment where drinking is encouraged/promoted? Even wineries are becoming one of the principle venues for events in this country.

I'm not saying we need to ditch the liquor industry altogether, hell, I still like doing shows in pubs – it's easy, the production is already there, drunk people can be fun and there some great bars around ran by awesome people – people from

the music scene, people who understand other musicians, people doing their best to create an enjoyable environment in a shitty situation.

Ian massively affected my life and I immediately ceased sponsorship from an alcohol company. A non-drinker since I was 17 (well, until 6 months before publishing this book), I never felt comfortable with the sponsorship but I believed it was a necessary evil for the tours to exist. It was easy to get sponsorship, but it felt completely hypocritical. I've always told myself that the tours did more good than harm, but I was uncomfortable with the prospect I might have encouraged people to drink.

Why is alcohol considered a lesser evil than cigarettes?

In the US cigarettes are attributed for just under 500,000 deaths a year, alcohol for over 1 million (where alcohol causes a condition leading to death). In 2012, a German university, *University Medicine Greifswald* published a report finding that heavy drinkers are much more prone to death than those who smoke.

Many people die in NZ every year in circumstances directly related to alcohol, not least of all drunk driving yet our response seems to be quirky ads hinting at the damage alcohol does or “shock” advertising showing the result of drinking and driving. Ads asking people politely not to kill themselves, but not putting any real restrictions on the supply of the material killing them?

If ONE kid goes to hospital for taking some sort of “party pill” it’s national news, but when every weekend numerous people get arrested or go to hospital as a result of their abuse of alcohol, we just sweep it under the carpet.

We let alcohol companies run rampant with their sponsorship and association with events in New Zealand, how come cigarettes come under MASSIVE sanctions – plain packaging, bans on advertising and sponsorship – yet the alcohol industry gets away with, quite literally, murder<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 600 and 800 people in New Zealand have been estimated to die each year from alcohol-related causes

One in five (19%) New Zealanders aged 15 years or more who drank alcohol in the past year has a potentially hazardous drinking pattern (*Ministry of Health*, 2013).

On weekends, 60-70% of injury-based emergency department presentations are estimated to be alcohol-related.

approximately one-third of all police apprehensions involve alcohol

half of serious violent crimes are related to alcohol

over 300 alcohol-related offences are committed every day

each day, 52 individuals or groups of people are either driven home or detained in police custody because of intoxication.

In 2012, driver alcohol was a contributing factor in 73 fatal crashes, 331 serious injury crashes and 933 minor injury crashes. These crashes resulted in 93 deaths, 454 serious injuries and 1,331 minor injuries

A 2009 study, applying a methodology endorsed by the *World Health Organization*, estimated harmful alcohol use cost New Zealand \$4.9 billion in 2005/06 (Bert 2009). However, previous estimates have ranged from \$735 million to \$16.1 billion (*Law Commission*, 2009, p168).

Seriously. What the fuck are we doing? 800 people a year dying and we're doing nothing about it other than some curious ad campaigns? The sanctions put on cigarettes in the 90s led to a huge reduction in not only the amount of people who smoke, but its perception also. Similar sanctions need to be placed upon alcohol.

Now I'm no killjoy, I believe adults have the right to make their own decisions and they should have the right to choose if they want to do something that's bad for them (hell, I consume enough sugar to kill an elephant) but I don't believe that something so harmful to our society can get away with sponsoring sports events, music events and can have advertising displayed where anybody can see it, of any age.

We all remember growing up in school, the cool kids got drunk on the weekends in their desperate search to be grown-up – “everyone does it” – it's an attitude that has continued to dominate our lives since. Imagine the uproar if after a rugby game the camera cut to the changing rooms and you saw half a dozen All-Blacks lighting up and celebrating after a win with a long drag on a cigarette. How is knocking back beers and pouring booze on each other more socially acceptable? We'd maybe live in a very different world if instead the camera cut to some players sitting around enjoying a nice red and not back slapping each other and making it appear it was good ol' beer that fuelled their victory.

I may be not *much* of a drinker, but I like hanging out with people who have had a few. My non-drinking might lead me to be a bit serious/boring sometimes but I still know how to party when I want, and some say that I throw the best parties in the country, but I have a real problem with young people not being able to make the choice to be a drinker or not. They don't have a choice. Removing advertising and its glorification by personalities just like we did with cigarettes is the only way to really give young people an option.

In April 2014, the *New Zealand Music Commission* announced a partnership with *Becks* (a beer brand) that sees them becoming a key sponsor for *New Zealand Music Month* (NZMM), in fact, *Becks* is the only corporate sponsor of NZMM.

Music from New Zealand is enjoyed and indulged by many under 18 - that this partnership was just accepted without anyone kicking up a stink shows just how bad things are. I don't even blame the NZMC here, I'm not judging them or any of the bands who are involved with *Becks* – though I personally try to avoid alcohol sponsorship, I know people have to pay the bills and it's pretty hard to turn down easy money when you're working fulltime in some job you hate to keep your music happening.

The major promotion that *Becks* did for music month was a series of interactive posters placed around the country where people could play a series of NZ tracks by pressing buttons on the poster – yeah, cool idea, but who is this targeted at? The ones who would find this most engaging and are the youth – it's one of the

most blatant way in which an alcohol company has abused sponsorship to target kids without anyone noticing.

The amount of money companies like *Becks* throw at musicians is absurd and impossible to turn down when our industry struggles so much. They know this and take advantage and use the desperation of New Zealand artists to pay their bills to present themselves in-front of young people whenever they can.

The music industry may decry this accusation, declaring that it is only alcohol brands who are interested in aligning themselves with music. Why is this you think? Is it because we've grown to accept that music can only be presented in bars and watched with a drink in-hand? No other self respecting brand can bother associating themselves with music because booze is perceived to "own it"?

Our "national showcase" festival? New Zealand bands only all day, with an audience of 15 years old and up. It's not Jim Beam *presents* Homegrown, the name of the event IS *Jim Beam Homegrown*. Our month of celebrating local music is presented by *Becks*, our local music festival is called *Jim Beam*. Not sure whether to laugh or cry.

The situation is so depressing and far gone I'm not sure it can ever be repaired -- but you *can* make some difference by challenging it anytime you see an alcohol brand aligning themselves with a brand of product which reaches a young audience. If enough industry start to realise the responsibility they have to the health of people in this country, and how they're just pawns in a game played by the alcohol industry, maybe then they'll try harder to work up business models unreliant on liquor money or find other types of businesses interested in working with music.

Chapter 7

# **MUSIC FUNDING IN NZ IS JUST A TEMPORARY FIX**

The problem with arts (music) funding in New Zealand, regardless of the agency it's coming from, is that it exists. Do we need funding? Yes. Should we need it? No.

Whenever you're fixing a problem, you need to at least attempt to fix the root of the problem, not just apply a *band-aid* and hope it will go away. Due to many of the reasons I talk about in this book and principally due to our small and spread out population, it is nearly impossible to derive an income and build a long term career from creating original music in New Zealand.

Musicians often can't make enough money to be able to afford to record songs, make music videos, tour, release albums – the industry's solution? Give 'em some money, hopefully the problem goes away (for a while).

The money is great. Seriously, it's awesome and the recent *New Zealand on Air* (NZOA) overhaul addressed some long overdue issues. When you do receive these sums of cash they go a long way to relieving some short term concerns, but inevitably, the money goes and you're back again asking for hand-outs once more.

We need to work on creating a system where bands and artists no longer need to ask for money to survive. The funding needs to be redirected (proportionately) into readying for the future – a time when the money dries up.

And it is likely the money may dry up, but even if it doesn't, relying on constant support from the government to create music is as depressing as it is inefficient.

It's desperately important that a 15-30 year plan is put in action with clear and realistic outcomes whose principle task is to build and develop new infrastructure and an audience that is able to support the arts without relying on government intervention.

All very nice in theory right? How do we put this into practice?

Briefly I'll introduce some of the principle funding available for music in New Zealand.

NZOA is the most prevalent, providing around \$200,000 each month for ten months of the year for funding of recordings and videos. Around 2 million dollars yearly will fund approximately 250 projects. NZOA also fund many radio programmes, digital content, provide CDs they send around radio stations and provide many other services, but certainly the most visible to the public and most accessible for artists is the *Making Tracks* programme detailed above.

Much of what the *NZ Music Commission* (NZMC) do is behind the scenes and not directly funding projects but working with schools to educate kids and support NZ showcases at events around world as well as supporting musicians through training, workshops and online information, also facilitating NZ Music Month as well as a ton of other stuff - but most visibly, they take care of distributing funding for "*Outward Sound*" (OS) which are market development grants from \$1,000 to \$50,000 to bands wanting to export to another country. These grants need to be matched equally by the applying band, ie: a grant of \$10,000 is for a



project costing at least \$20,000.

Finally *Creative NZ* fund the less commercial end of the spectrum and do three yearly rounds of “Quick Response” grants a year where the maximum asked for is \$7500 and two a year of maximum \$65,000. There are many projects funded over a wide array of disciplines, music does get funded but this is not for commercial outcomes so much as the other two funding agencies.

So yeah, this RULES. It’s awesome to be in a country where there is ample access to funding opportunities and providing you are willing to play the game and your material fits within their (pretty broad) guidelines there is every possibility you might get some money to give you a little boost.

The people distributing the money do a pretty decent job too, but there are still problems with the model: there is still a heavy selection process; the money doesn’t translate into artists sustaining themselves; there are still many acts falling through the gaps; and there is no thought given to when the money dries up.

So what could we do? Below I’m spit-balling and some of the ideas are meant more to generate discussion than to be taken literally, but I am just trying to show what is possible when looking at the actual problem – lack of audience – not the result of that problem – artists have no money.

#### NEW FUNDING IDEAS

##### CREATING A RECORDING INFRASTRUCTURE.

A recording studio doesn’t need a retail street front, or even any sort of prime high street location. Rent on a decent space to put in a studio might cost \$15k a year. Maybe another \$5k in readying the room – acoustically treating, building booth etc. Anyway, a grant of \$20k gives an engineer who already has the equipment, a year long lease on a studio and a huge kickstart. If you were to take 1/10th of the annual funding for recordings and videos, you could give a leg-up to 10 studios around NZ looking to start up.

In return for that \$20k kickstart, they need to give up two days recording each fortnight for an artist for a single (chosen by NZonAir). Two full days is generally enough time to record and mix a single song, if you don’t fuck around. So each studio records 26 projects a year. Any engineer looking to build a studio and wanting a \$20k investment should happily devote 2 days a fortnight in exchange – not only is it a small price to pay, but you get experience, meet clients who if you work well with might hire you independently of the funding time.

You’ve just funded 260 recordings for 1/10th of the budget, not only that but you’ve given much needed real world experience to a group of young engineers and started building infrastructure.

Obviously the problems with this are bands lose options of who they can

record with, but I'm not saying that this needs to be the ONLY way to fund new recordings, I'm saying that this sort of thing needs to happen *as well*. Funding 30 odd less projects the conventional way can set aside funds for this other concept. A new level of funding could be introduced for brand new acts (bands) for whom this type of funding is acceptable – of course, it doesn't give bands the opportunity to skim off the top also (sorry everyone).

You could potentially tie this in with *Mainz* (Engineering School) to provide 1-2 of their top students from each graduation a grant to start a studio (only if they already have equipment etc – or perhaps other hardware companies ie: *The Rockshop* could be bought in to make awards of hardware as well) – as well as engineers independent of *Mainz*.

Funding studios outside of main centres can also help build communities around those studios in small towns. Studios can often act as sort of drop in studios for bands and really help build communities. In the early 00's before I started *A Low Hum* I had an inner city photographic studio in Wellington. I let some musician friends set up desks in the main room of that studio and threw some couches in and soon enough it became a sweet little drop in for many musicians in the community. People would come over before and after shows, bands would jam their sometimes – a communal, incubating space like this is so important a way of getting bands hanging out with each other, coming up with new projects, helping each other – take a look at the community built up around *Lee Prebble* and *The Surgery* in Wellington.

Another issue with this plan is it narrows down the kind of projects that could be funded and channeled through this system - that is where much of the problem lies with NZOA – many artists don't actually require that much money to record anyway. In many cases producers just need a cash injection of around \$1000, something that means they can spend some time devoted to nailing the production of a track, they don't need \$4000. How about another idea, that several levels of funding are offered, take around \$100k of the yearly funding (1/20th) and give 80 grants of \$1000 to producers and 40 grants of \$500 to remix projects.

## DEVELOPING A NEW AUDIENCE.

Not NZOA's mandate right now, but it needs to be. Getting more NZ content on the airwaves is directly related to getting more New Zealander's listening and viewing NZ content. It is irrelevant how much NZ content is provided if there is nobody paying any attention. It seems that this next project should be more in the NZMCs court, but NZOA need to update their mandate to include building audience, not just creating content for existing audiences.

Currently the only real strategies of getting young people involved with music are competitive in nature. *The Rockquest* and *Play it Strange* are both successful projects at getting young people engaged with music, however, they only engage

a very small percentage of people, the musicians, and needing more musicians is not the problem, gaining an audience FOR those musicians is.

In the early 00s there were a very successful succession of “Schools Tours”, featuring the current top Christian alternative act of the day (the tours were heavily funded/curated by religious groups) - these tours would take a local act around a whole bunch of schools and (for better or worse) inspire audiences with real world bands (albeit some awful ones).

When young people leave school there is really nothing else to do. They just simply follow the status quo and follow others in their peer groups to getting drunk and heading out to party at the standard night spots. Many are unaware of the other options life offers.

I remember the show which changed my life and set me on an obsession with local music: seeing *Weta* support *Everclear* in '96 at the *James Cabaret*. I was a huge fan of *Everclear* at the time and seeing a local band I was unaware of blow away a band who I thought was “all-that”, well, it woke me up. I suddenly started paying attention to the live music scene right under my nose.

It's the same reason I'm not an avid hater of *NZ Music Month* as even though it's a cheesy concept and doesn't actually do much of anything for local artists other than give media an excuse to ignore them for the other 11 months of the year, well, what good it does is act as a gateway drug for kids – for many, identifying themselves with what they think is a movement “NZ Music” gets them scraping the surface and discovering some actual talent. I know of many previous target tee wearing kids who are now super supportive of the scene.

I am not sure if there are many other people in NZ who have directly seen the difference reaching out to young people with good music makes, there are people still now coming to my shows and events ten years on who started coming to my all ages shows in their communities back in '04-'07. When you realise how much live music means to you, you're a lifer, we just need to reach out to more people.

How about we take another slice of that budget, let's say \$300k. Buy two PAs and two pretty decent long wheel base vans. You'd probably easily be able to get some serious sponsorship for the PAs, but let's pretend you can't.

An initial investment of \$35k per project. \$15-25k for a decent PA that will work for a 300-400 or so audience. (Totally doable – especially if buying two of them through same company who will do hefty discount). I once did a schools tour with *Die Die Die* taking along my own PA, which at the time was lacking a few pieces of essential equipment, but it still cost around \$12k and there aren't many bands who you'd need a bigger PA for than them. (I've been using that PA for four years since, at tons of shows, at my festival every year and it's been blasting in my bar for two years and I've only had to repair one speaker, once).

Drop another \$10k on a decent second hand van.

Salary for someone to look after project (book shows, liase with schools/bands), \$40k.

At the start of the project 40 key colleges are identified and are asked to host one show per month Each month two bands tour the country playing 20 schools each.

#### Each project

With an average size tour party of six people includes performers + engineer/roadie + tour manager

Everybody gets “per-diems” of \$30 each per day (for food)

Accommodation budget of \$300 per day (two “Family rooms” at a hotel – this could very likely be discounted heavily if using chains, and all-the-time)

Petrol/Incidentals of \$50 per day (doing twenty shows around the country, you’re not driving far each day)

TM + Engineer get paid \$100 each per day.

Many tour parties are going to be smaller, also like briefly mentioned, accom should be sussed cheaply when doing this often – any extra money saved can be put into things like maintenance, website etc.

A total cost of \$730 per day x 20 days on road is \$14600 per tour. Ten tours per year per project (taking into account school holidays etc). \$14600, that’s only a little more than a single video/recording project, and you know what, hire a tour manager who can shoot video and well, after 20 shows you’ve got yourself a kick ass live video as well.

This is pretty easy to do, when doing this schools tour for *Die Die Die*, I made such a video<sup>1</sup>, edited in one night in Dunedin on the tour and stuck it online whilst on tour.

Even if the TM can shoot and someone else edits it, either way, you’ve suddenly got a video out of it, so fulfilling a little requirement from NZOA right there, not to mention a NZ band having the opportunity to play 20+ shows, so getting hell awesome live, plus building a fanbase and future audience.

The performers don’t get paid, but all their costs are covered and they’re free to arrange their own shows in the evening in towns all over the country and they’ve got a PA and engineer with them so can effectively play anywhere (the benefits of this echo several of my essays in this book), not to mention they have their weekends free also – they can also sell merch at shows. There aren’t many bands in the country who wouldn’t leap at this.

There are many other things you can make happen with this plan. You can engage schools to get more involved. The bands could meet with music students for a special monthly session, media students could get involved with the show and put their learnings into practise, local school bands could open the show. The opportunity could be taken to introduce some new skills to kids as well, an introduction to live sound, lighting, filming etc...

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<sup>1</sup> Youtube: Die Die Die Wasted Lands 2010 NZ Tour

It's about repetition. If a band visits a high school in Timaru once in a year, it might be unlikely to have an effect, but bands visiting every single month and of different genres?

All up you're looking at \$292k + set up costs including yearly salary, of around \$100k. So \$400k for 400 shows a year at schools around NZ *plus* putting bands into small towns, for evening concerts.

That's 505 projects funded, up from 250, presented 400 shows around NZ and still have over quarter of a million bucks to play with. What next?

Let's just throw a generic figure of \$50k back into the project to cover additional resources required on managing the whole bunch of new projects and throw that last \$250k into video making.

## VIDEOS

Now, let's be honest. \$6k doesn't go far when making a music video. It's the great lie in music video making in NZ, you're still gonna get the same video no matter how much money is being spent. \$6k doesn't suddenly put you in the realms of creating videos like Katy Perry, all it does it means the people who work on your video get some sort of compensation for their time – granted it will probably still work out that the crew on the video are getting paid \$2per hour, but at least it's something right?

Video funding has been great for NZ, it's given some really talented directors a leg up and meant they can focus fulltime on their craft. Absolutely invaluable. At some point though, we need to learn to live without the funding, stand on our own two feet. We should be using some of this money to upskill and train musicians in video editing and train up and coming video-makers.

You know those studios we set up around the country in the earlier part of this essay? Well, you could throw those engineers some more money each year to help facilitate the next part of this project by storing a "video kit" for lend. NZOA could put together 10 basic video kits containing for example a *Canon 5D*, a couple of lenses and some basic tools like a shoulder rig, budget stedicam etc, maybe a couple of lights. These kits would probably cost \$15-20k each. You could offer bands free use of this gear for a week if they have their track approved, or rent out for a small fee if not. Now there is a wee bit of work in doing all this and keeping track, so these studios would need to be paid in return.

Taking it to another level, NZOA could even invest in several editing suites and install them at these studios, and give people access to the editing suites.

I'm not suggesting that this scheme replace the current scheme, it's still important that many acts are just given some money (at this stage) to choose what people they want to work with and use that money interestingly, especially if they are going to do effects heavy videos or animations, however, it's silly that we just throw away ALL that money every year and don't create or train any people with it.

NZ is unique in the music world as I discuss in chapter ten and to compensate we need to be multi skilled, ie: bands often need to be able to self-managed , record themselves, make their own videos, be their own booking agents etc. To survive and carve a career in this industry we need to be more versatile than those in other countries.

To pull off this project we're looking around \$200k for the camera kits, I'd offer \$3000 to each of the studios for facilitation. Putting a latest generation Mac with a licensed video editing program in each studio too, another \$50k. Then putting put another \$100k into training sessions. You could offer ten people well versed in editing \$10,000 each who are based near each of these studios to offer 1 day a week tutorials for video makers.

For this \$400k, you've got 10 set-ups around the country capable of assisting up to 50 acts each per week. Bands get 1 weeks free rental of the camera equipment and 1 week free access to an editing suite with a full days tutorial from an editing pro - 1 full-on day of teaching is all you need to understand all the basics of decent editing, plus the resources are all available online to answer any questions you have about editing.

Remember, most of those costs, \$250 of the \$400k are set-up first year costs, the following years of this project you can throw that money back into more training, maintenance of gear, buying additional gear for the more popular towns that its working in, or putting more money into traditional funding methods.

To summarise we've taken that \$2 million in government money that was to fund 250 recording/video projects and we've redistributed it to create:

- 1 million – to fund 125 projects within existing framework

- \$200k to set up 10 studios and create a potential 260 recording projects

- \$100k to fund 80 producer projects and 40 remix projects

- \$300k to develop a future audience by presenting 400 shows around NZ per year.

- \$50k to cover additional project management and implementation

- \$400k to start video creation initiatives leading to a possible 500 projects yearly.

Totaling \$2.05 million first year costs. \$1.7million for consecutive years for similar outcomes.

So that's 125 (existing style) recording and video projects, 380 new recording projects and a potential 500 video projects (1005 projects total, up from 250) + 400 shows around NZ building a huge foundation for a future audience. We've set up ten studios around NZ giving important experience for up and coming engineers and provided more bases to build communities in smaller towns, we've trained a bunch of musicians in video editing and started work to build an infrastructure that doesn't rely so heavily on government funding – in that even if the money received by NZOA was to drastically reduce, they have created a

framework that they can still achieve results with.

That \$300k we've got available for future projects after the initial set-up costs have been covered I would direct into another way of building future audiences.

## NEW RADIO

In my original collection of essays making up this book, one of them written in 2009 was about the dire state of commercial radio in New Zealand and I suggested looking at supporting online streaming infrastructure as a way of combating that. I assumed that within five years in New Zealand that the Internet would finally have no data limits placed on it, like most of the world, and online streaming of radio could be a real possibility. Five years later, and though not here yet, it still seems inevitable that unlimited data will arrive eventually, rates are definitely coming down enough that online stations are looking more and more viable.

The loss of community around music has been one of the greatest culprits around diminishing audiences and a way to really bring back more community into the music scene is to establish more passionate radio stations. The support network built around *Fleet Fm*<sup>2</sup> in Auckland in the mid-late 00's was inspirational.

You may notice throughout this book I don't make mention too much of the Internet and how to use it for various projects as I didn't want these ideas to be about relying on technology which may change and adapt, but more traditional ideas. Online radio is very established internationally and the only reason why it doesn't really work here is our data limits are still so restricted.

I believe it's important to develop now a firm base of quality stations so when online radio really does catch on that we have great infrastructure ready to take hold.

As technology adapts it is generally about narrowing fields and providing a more custom/individual user experience. Already there are so many ways people can listen and discover music without radio – however, radio's importance at introducing people to new music is drastically important, but the only way to keep radio relevant over online tools like *Pandora* is to build that community around it, to have “real people” involved. People still and always will desire that personal connection – it's why one of the only “traditional” sector of the music industry experiencing growth at the moment is festivals because the festival experience cannot be replicated digitally – just like that connection with a community.

I would take that last \$300k and fund ten projects a year at \$30k each. This is to fund an internet radio station for *two years* and is only funded on certain milestones. An initial payment of \$5000 is made to purchase a basic laptop, license for solid broadcasting software (Ie: *Sam Broadcaster* by *Spacial*), some microphones, soundcard, hosting/streaming and internet account plus deposit on an office space.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet\\_FM](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fleet_FM)

A further \$5000 is granted each quarter (3 month period) the station is operational given they meet certain criteria – ie: have a certain amount of live hosting per week. The groups identified to receive funding for these stations would need to be very niche. There is no point trying to launch generic stations, people won't bother listening to online stations that are the same as terrestrial stations – the point is to create a varied and considered range of specialist stations. You're looking for groups that already have some community built around them and access to plenty of recordings. Groups like *Kerosene Comic Book*, *Melted Ice Cream*, *Dawn Raid* (so perfect, *Dawn RAIDio* anyone?!), *Whammy/Wine Cellar*, *Beyond the Black*, *Punkas.com*, *Flying Nun/Out*, *Sound Explorers* etc – the potential list is massive. *The Audio Foundation* in Auckland currently broadcast not only online, but from a low power transmitter also.

I spent some time preparing to launch an *A Low Hum* online station a few years back (to test this idea) and had everything ready to go, just didn't have a space that others could access and didn't want to have to DJ live myself all the time - plus, numerous other projects piled up - but I think this is a great way to build communities and bring existing communities closer together.

A primary focus on this project is finding a sweet space that is accessible 24 hours by all those involved. It doesn't need to be retail or premium office space, it could be 10 floors up hidden away in an office building – places like these you can find rad spaces for like \$5-7500. The whole point is to build a community, so you want a choice space to run the station from. Operating out of a bedroom shouldn't be allowed. You want a space you can throw some couches, a bigger stereo to run the laptop into, some posters on the wall, some desks etc...

The grant should basically cover all operational and rent costs plus leave around \$100 a week to offer small wages for those primarily running it – though it would still largely need a volunteer base to make it awesome. Because the funding would be based on (very simple targets) it gives those running it, incentive to grow and keep station running, rather than just dishing out a lump sum and crossing fingers.

Software like "Sam" is incredibly powerful and can help you set up amazing virtual radio stations capable of operating 24 hours, crossfading songs, smart playlisting, allowing people to request songs online from a catalogue, giving great statistics on listenership, people listening online can purchase the music they're listening to etc and it can be set up in 10 minutes.

As part of their receipt of funding, these groups could be encouraged to play a minimum of 30% locally produced music – which, well, they would probably do without asking anyway, but as a way of fitting within NZOA's mandate, this would go a long way.

In 2013, one of the most hilariously ill-conceived and now infamous NZOA funded projects (though, from a quota for "Digital/Online" projects) was launched to universal disdain. *Indie Music Manager* costing just shy of \$300k



was launched and failed. I tried playing it many times but like everyone else who tried, after a while it just crashed. I was gutted too, I managed to get *Street Chant* earning 100k after just a handful of shows (surely, based in reality) before it crashed that last time. Perhaps the game was designed to crash just after you got things happening to simulate a real world experience - maybe it was actually “genius”.

The reasoning for this game’s existence, to “train future managers” of bands was a stunning misappropriation of funds. We don’t have a lack of band managers in NZ because people don’t know how to do it, we have a lack because there is no money involved. 15% of fuck-all is sweet fuck-all. Once again, not identifying the actual issue and funding a temporary fix rather than the actual problem of lack of audience.

The larger bands in NZ have managers because there is income for them. NZ is not like other countries. You do not NEED a manager here to book you a four date “national” tour or contact the dozen relevant press about your latest release – sure, it helps, but you shouldn’t get a manager *until you don’t need one*. NZOA could have given instead, any one of the dozens of working managers out there in NZ a 30th of that money to write a book about what they actually do as a manager then just make this a free resource to anyone who wishes. The game was a joke. Play it (if you can find it).

Imagine, if instead of that money being spent on one silly game, it had set up ten office/studios around New Zealand to act as the hub of a community that was hinged around discovering and broadcasting new music to a new audience? A bunch of people hanging out playing music for others, a sweet place to gather and hang out, talk about music, hang at before shows, create projects – the spaces could even become practice rooms.

If there was just a shortcut on my phone that I could hit and it launched up a player for a radio station run by some people with an actual presence in my community – putting on shows, releasing records, doing cool shit – I’d be listening to it all the time – if it showed me on the phone at the same time the name of the tracks I was listening to, it would make a massive difference. All New Zealand petrol stations should have similar software anyway after somebody read my essay on APRA, and implemented that idea - so tying in together, should be easy...right.

There are a ton of people in NZ who can make shit happen, give them some cash – even just a wee bit.

## OUTWARD SOUND

I was excited when I first heard about *Outward Sound* (OS). Its managed by the *New Zealand Music Commission* (NZMC) and I think they do an admirable job of distributing the funds. However, I feel any funding model which puts

the power in the hands of a few is fundamentally wrong.

OS was a knee-jerk reaction to the success of *The Datsuns*. The NZ music industry finally realised what idiots they were not to take notice of this marketable-as-fuck band before it was too late. They were upset about missing a piece of the glory and among other things, lamented the lost revenue by having *The Datsuns* sign to a UK label; none of that money would be coming into NZ.

Initially OS was pitched to the government as: give us some money and we'll help more bands get overseas so when 'the next *Datsuns*' happens, the money comes back to NZ and not just overseas pockets. It was proposed that the millions spent on OS could be recouped if only a small percentage of the funded artists made good on their potential. At its very core it was an export development scheme and the money thrown at the project each year is not a gift to the bands, but an investment.

It confuses me a little -- this no longer seems to be the focus. The funding now simply appears to be to assist NZ musicians to exploit international markets. Who does this benefit? The artists involved benefit slightly, but principally offshore companies reap the profits -- and this seems a very odd thing for the government to fund.

It is very different to NZOA where the funding is to create new works to present to a NZ audience and at least in theory -- enrich our culture. Sending bands overseas, how exactly does this benefit NZ if the companies involved are not NZ owned?

The NZ government is essentially just making it easier for overseas labels to make money by sending NZ bands to them.

To me it seems that rather than create a system that just gives small groups of NZ artists a leg-up, that a system be in place that assists any musician who has the chance to do something internationally -- with a strict caveat of them needing to keep at the very least management or a label that pays tax in NZ.

Grants range from \$1000-\$50,000. The artist or record label is meant to match this grant with the same amount. Grants are paid to artists after tours are completed and they must show they spent the same amount of their own money.

To the naive, OS grants may seem huge, but to be honest, attempting to break a significant USA/UK market with \$50-100k is virtually impossible. For example, just one of *Ladyhawke's* music videos from her last album cost more than £100,000. *Pacifier*, *Steriogram* and *Zed's* labels spent more like a million dollars (on each) trying to break them in the USA. Those are the kind of figures we are talking, and that's for artists already in those territories.

So, the grants have effectively become an artist holiday funding scheme. It's not the NZMC's fault. I just think that bands are taking the piss a little.

So, what is the money being used for?

If you receive NZ\$10,000 maybe that means your airfares are paid for. If you receive \$30,000 it means instead of roughing it with accom you're staying in

budget hotels, can afford a good rental van and hired backline. \$50,000 – maybe with that you can get a few more internal flights instead of driving everywhere, can take an engineer with you, pay everyone decent pier-diems, buy ads in street press for your shows and get nice accom on the tour. It's not going to 'break' you. Not even if your label matches that figure (as they are meant to).

Touring overseas is expensive<sup>2</sup> though it is VERY easy to quickly blow \$50,000, especially if the money ain't yours. It's a drop in the ocean. If you were to put a band in a budget hotel each night (something you'd be doing with \$50k funding), for just *one* month on the road of a six person tour party, you'd be looking in the area of \$12,000NZD – JUST for accommodation)

NZ bands' attitude to funding is pretty classic. It's something everyone likes to bitch about when they don't get it, but as soon as they start getting industry support and a taste of funding, suddenly everybody shuts up.

There's not much OS money to go around and it's spread thinly, the NZMC receives just \$400,000 per year for *Outward Sound*. In the real world, ignoring the internet, that's approximately the cost of releasing *one* single by *one* band to mainstream radio in the USA. So the NZMC are trying to spread this paltry budget over 30-odd bands per year. They also spend another \$140,000 on tradeshows and showcases like *SXSW*, *CMJ*, *Womex*, *Midem*, *AMWE* and *Big Sound*. *CMJ* and *SXSW* are their two major focuses, hosting NZ showcase events at these – some good comes of them, but to justify this amount of money and effort?

Sure, I've applied for funding and been rejected. I don't blame the NZMC – my applications have been hopeless, I'll admit that. I just believe it's something that shouldn't have to be applied for. Nobody can pick what is going to be successful overseas. People think they do, and to an extent some have higher odds of succeeding than others, but I find it disturbing that the same industry that missed *The Datsuns* and every other NZ artists who made it big on their own is in charge of finding the new ones?

However much money they have, it will just be spent. So why not squeeze every last dollar? Why not give everybody a little bit, rather than a selected few a lot? Let's build an infrastructure that will cast the net wider instead of throwing money at a few bands and praying some of it finds a target.

HOW?

I'm confident that the number of international tours (not including Australia) undertaken by NZ artists would not overtake 50 in any given year. What if every artist/band who can show they have 10 or more shows booked outside New Zealand and/or can show at least a few industry types (labels, publicists, promoters, booking agents, managers) are keen to see them plus has booked and

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<sup>2</sup> Though it's very possible to tour the world bare bones for cheap as explained in my other book "DIY Touring the World"

paid for their flights receives \$8000 (when they get back from that tour).

This makes unbelievable sense to me. And if NZMC have more than 50 bands asking for this grant (how great would that be!) I'm sure it could be figured out. Remember that money is only paid out once the band has completed their overseas mission and can show they completed the objectives. Even with 100 bands a year (pretty damn unlikely, but still would leave \$4000 each, which is a really nice little welcome back gift).

To me this is a true export development plan. There is no bureaucracy or specific taste dictating who can receive the funding and it's an amount of money that actually offers some assistance. It would certainly encourage more acts to tour. This means a more diverse range of bands get a chance and there's an improved chance those bands won't slip through the fingers of the NZ industry.

An ever better way to squeeze every dollar is to invest in infrastructure to share among bands. This funding scheme may end and if infrastructure is in place, assistance for bands could potentially last beyond the scheme.

So how about that \$400,000 a year is spent on stuff that can help ANY band from NZ?

I'm just throwing ideas around here, but what if:

A few ex-pats in LA, NYC, London, Berlin, Melbourne, etc, are offered a little stipend to look after a backline during the year. NZMC fork out like \$10,000 a pop for 5 half decent backlines (like a drumkit, 2 guitar amps, bass rig, keyboard stands, cables, etc) for 5 main cities. These can be borrowed by bands on a first-in first-served basis for around 3-4 weeks at a time. Also available to borrow is compact but tough cases to carry merch around.

Booking agents are subsidised in the UK/EU and USA to offer advice on booking shows, good contacts, etc. Though really, my other book on touring will probably help much more than any of that crap.

NZMC develop relationships with budget motel chains in Europe/UK/USA. NZ bands not only get discounted accom, but NZMC further subsidises accommodation as well.

NZMC fund the production of 500 CDs for you to take on tour, to collect when you arrive overseas – not only to sell on tour, but to give to industry you are meeting – labels, publishers, publicists etc... Sure the CD is dying as a format to sell in retail, but it's still a great tool for selling at shows and to give to people (Just for how long, who knows)

NZMC pays for UK work permits (£200 per band) when band has 10+ UK shows booked.

NZMC covers a percentage of USA visa applications, say 20%. A flat is rented in NYC, London and Berlin for bands to crash in for up to two weeks at a time. Just a basic flat with power and maybe 10 mattresses, two bands could stay at a time. An ex-pat in that city might be able to oversee this for another small stipend.

I could go on forever coming up with ideas like this, but you get the point. Bands don't need to have their hands held on tours. Just offer them assistance with the absolute basics. Stuff like this saves time, money and hassle.

I think *Outward Sound* have done a pretty good job of distributing the small amount of funding they get. I can't poke too many holes, however funding on a case-by-case basis is an outdated model. Rather than crossing your fingers and hoping you've chosen the right act, simply remove the roadblocks and let a swarm of bands have a crack at it on their own terms.

I don't think my ideas are the total solution, but I know it wouldn't be too hard to sort something better out. Many of the NZ bands who have made an impact overseas recently didn't have a ton of industry waiting to see them or requesting their presence, they were bands who believed in themselves and took the risk and went and backed themselves to play shows in another territory.

For example. Say NZMC gave an experienced tour manager \$100,000. This is what they could do.

Rent a 2-3 bed flat on outskirts of London and make sure can sleep 4-6 people. \$35k NZD

Purchase a 6 seater van with room for backline. \$10k NZD

Purchase a 2nd people mover. Not so much room for backline, for electronic acts and for when other vehicle being used. \$5kNZD

Purchase a backline. \$10k NZD

Repairs, maintenance, parking, power etc. \$10k NZD

Wages for the tour manager. \$20k per year (taking into account free rent and bills paid, a fulltime wage is not required)

Left over money \$10k is offered as per diems to bands who make it over.

This is a difficult plan and the tour manager would need to do quite a bit of work here, making sure to fit in bands etc, especially during busy periods (festival season), but they have a couple of vehicles and backline to lend so even if they can't drive an artist around, they can most likely lend gear. For when acts are playing in the UK, they can always drive back to London after shows for free accom. The tour manager could also help book shows for acts who were committed to coming over.

It's a crazy plan I'll admit it. I could pull it off (though I'm too old to spend a year touring now) and I'm sure many others could, though of course you take that massive risk that you set up all this infrastructure and no bands actually make the effort to come. I mean, it's not the end of the world...though really in the context of funding, it's only 3 or so projects funded in the current system, the odds that you wouldn't even help minimum three bands with this project is pretty unlikely.

On my estimates of the number of NZ bands actually touring without knowledge of the industry, this would help dozens and dozens a year – Once in 2008 I was asked to put together a “NZ showcase” in Leeds while I was there...I

THE PROBLEM WITH MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND  
AND HOW TO FIX IT

looked into all the NZ bands touring UK and Europe that summer and there were around 30 who would get near to London in the summer of that year. I couldn't be fucked putting on that show cos I already had enough on my plate, but it blew me the hell away just how many bands from New Zealand were touring who were doing it under the radar. I was proud.

These are just ideas, (and I know some are pretty crazy) but they're to get people thinking about the massive scope of possibility and how we can be using this money wisely to prepare for a time when it's gone.

Chapter 8

# **GUEST LISTS ARE ABUSED & WHY ARE SHOWS STILL \$5?**

New Zealanders have just gone crazy with the guest-lists. It's so embarrassing - we're a nation of cheapskates. Do you understand that the money taken at the door is (95% of the time) the way bands get paid for shows? Do you understand how much it costs to be in a band and put on a show? Do you understand that your selfish desire to save \$5 or \$10 "cause you are seeing a band with your friend in" means you're basically taking money straight out of your friend's pocket? What kind of friend does that make you?

I mean sure, if you've contributed something like lending gear or the visiting band are staying at your place, well that's fair enough. But...

The ones I really hate? The people who ask their friend in the supporting band to put them on the door, then they turn up an hour after the friend finished playing. It's obvious they were only interested in seeing the headline act for free. They then pretend to be upset about missing the friend's band.

You know the people I hate EVEN more? The ones who aren't on the door list and make me go and track down the band members and ask them direct, to their face. FUCK YOU for putting your friends in that awkward position, like they're even able to say "no" in that situation. You don't deserve to be their friend. Just pay for the show, support your friend, that's what a real friend would do.

Partners? Family? Of course, or if it's a special show like a going away, welcome back or album release, yeah, totally - you gotta be loose with the door list at these shows, the more the merrier, invite workmates, flatmates etc.... But your regular run-of-the-mill show? Why? Unless you really have a valid reason for being on the door, you should never even ask. Bands need to get in the habit of not even having door lists for regular shows.

Is it an expensive show you really want to see, but you're broke? Well, odds are the promoter has offered the support acts one guest per band member. Do you honestly think you deserve one of those?

Obviously I'm grumpier about this topic than others. This is a pet peeve. I get really frustrated when people stumble in drunk, breathing stinky booze-breath on me and try to convince me they're on the door when I know they're not. You have money for booze, but not for these bands?

It's tough when you set a precedent. Once you've door listed someone once, that person will have a mental hurdle about paying in future. With CALH I've



definitely noticed some people who have bought tickets a few times then joined a band. I'll book said band and they get free tickets for playing. When I can't have the band play the next year, those band members really struggle to buy tickets again once they've had a taste of free tickets and it breaks my heart.

This isn't just the story for CALH, but with so many events I've done. I also notice it with other promoters; if they give out a bunch of complimentary tickets for one of their shows, suddenly it makes everyone slow down buying tickets for the next show because they're hoping for that possible, eventual free ticket. I have been guilty of this behaviour more than once myself.

If it's media or industry you want along, any media who actually care about music should pay for a show. If you let them in for free you suddenly put them on this pedestal, declaring them more important than 'normal people' who had the decency to pay. If anything, industry should be expected to pay – they're probably the only people earning decent money out of music (by "industry" I mean just that, not part time media and freelance journalists who aren't getting paid a full-time wage in the industry). Why should they get in free when all the poor students and unemployed pay? If you have someone in the media who helped push the show BEFORE it took place, giving them a comp is totally fair – I've always seen this as payment in return for advertising.

Now, getting off my high horse for a few seconds I will admit, yes, there is something nice about being able to tell someone "you're on the door". It's pretty much the only perk a few of my friends get from knowing me. However, if they asked me every time I'd be a little miffed. It's something I like to offer people who deserve it. A lot of bands feel the same way; they're not really making money from shows, so they may as well enjoy giving their friends free entry. That doesn't mean you still can't make a donation/koha to that band or just pay the door charge anyway because you appreciate them and the effort they've put into the show.

Don't offer to "buy a band member a drink" because they put you on the door. Who is making money out of that? The bar? Booze distributor? Shit, how hard is it to pay some cash. Is \$10 really that much? If you can't afford \$10, how about you offer to hang around after the show and help pack down the gear - help with load out. Nobody has *ever* offered me that, but if somebody was truly broke, wasn't going to buy any booze and offered to help pack down or maybe stick up a few posters before the show – I'd maybe be cool with putting their name on the list, maybe.

So what am I getting at? How can we make door lists better?

#### GENERAL PUBLIC.

Don't ask to go on the guest list unless you really did something to help for that particular show. If you are offered your name on a door list and you were planning on watching the whole show and making a night of it anyway, just decline and pay - it's all about karma.

## BANDS

Just stop having door lists. Invited guests can just turn up and say they are so and so's 'plus one'. It's how I used to run the *A Low Hum* tours for all those years - never had a physical list but allowed each band member to have one guest and I'd keep a mental tally. Pretty easy.

If you're playing support for free or helping as crew at a show and not getting paid, then yeah, fair enough, you should be allowed some names on the door. If you're being paid, have some respect, be professional and don't push it.

## A NEW SYSTEM FOR NZ

How about, instead of having a door list of free entry, we adopt the system that many other countries use which is that the 'door list' is simply discounted entry. E.g. People on a door list for a \$10 show pay \$5. For a \$5 show, they pay gold coin, etc.

Which brings me to...

## WHY ARE SHOWS STILL \$5?

**W**hy are shows the same price as they were 30 years ago? Everything else costs more, why not shows? \$5 used to be a bit of money back in those days. Back then it could buy you dinner, now it buys you a bottle of water. Every other form of entertainment has increased in price over the past few decades, movies, sport fixtures, etc.

\$5 shouldn't even be an option as a show price. It's ridiculous really. Some Top 40 bars charge a cover of \$10-\$20 just to enter the premises. Yet a promoter will work for weeks on a live music show, four or so bands will put on a live performance for several hours and people are only prepared to pay \$5 for it?

Unless you're living on cat-food and your neighbour's banana peels there really is no excuse. Don't tell me you're broke with that cigarette hanging out of your mouth. Um, we are too. Sure, I believe there are some genuinely poor people out there who can't afford \$10 on a show, but you know what, I'm no fool. I've done the door hundreds and hundreds of times, I've had many people plead poverty and sometimes I've taken pity and given them a discount. Ten minutes later I see them open their wallet and pull out money to buy drinks at the bar. I've had people try to negotiate a bulk rate for them and two of their friends (since when is 3 people 'bulk?') talking me down in price and proceed to pay me with a \$100 note. These people have probably downed some beers at home, stopped in at a cafe for a latte and a smoke, dropping \$20 on unnecessary vices in the previous 90 minutes, only to give me attitude at the door cause I'm trying to cover costs on a show/tour.

Let's compare a few shows and see how much money everybody (in the underground) is(n't) making.

## DIY \$10 SHOW

A show where basically no money is spent ahead of it.

## BUDGET

Postering	\$20, just some photocopying, pasted up by self
Engineer	\$150

Let's assume there are no other promo costs, the PA was borrowed for free, venue free, door person free, no gear was needed. Best case scenario.

Now let's say you get a solid turnout and 100 people pay \$10 each, so you take \$1000 on the door. Subtract the costs of \$170 and you get \$830 profit. Split this between the four bands who played and it's \$207 a band. Split that between the band members and that's around \$50-\$70 each.

But that day each member probably bought dinner and a snack because they've been away from home all evening. They've also dropped petrol money, bus or taxi money to get gear there. Let's be conservative and say they spent \$20 on personal show-related costs.

So there we go, each band member walks away with \$30-\$50 from a pretty successful show. Not really enough to buy a quality drum skin, certainly not enough for practise spaces or buying gear. Taking into account sound check, performance and gear collection the next day they probably spent a good 10 hours working on the show. If the show was successful they make a few dollars an hour. Now this is unfortunately a really good result from a show, more often than not most bands will walk away with around \$50-100 per band – to split between 3-4 members.

Now, let's take best case scenario. A DIY show with *no costs* and 300 people paying \$10, that's a profit of \$3000. These shows are RARE in NZ for underground bands. We're talking very rare. Let's just assume all that money is split between just three bands. And let's say each band only has three members. Now this is very best case scenario. Each band gets \$1000! Fucken awesome. How often do these shows happen? Well, basically never, but if you're a lucky underground band, once every year or two, maybe.

So each band member made \$300. That's enough to buy a guitar pedal or a cymbal. How often do these types of shows happen? Oh yeah, never.

Nobody is getting anywhere, even at \$10. It's hard to invest in recordings, videos, tours and getting overseas when you're making barely enough to cover the cost of your broken guitar strings.

Now let's compare a 'properly promoted' show with four bands and see how it breaks down:

Venue rental	\$250
Engineer	\$150
Lighting hire/operator	\$150
Poster design	\$75
Poster printing/plaster	\$300
Doorperson	\$50
Total	\$975

This a normal budget for a weekend show with regular production/promotion. Now at \$10 entry, the promoter needs 100 people JUST to break even, so they're taking a pretty massive risk. Let's say it's a pretty successful show and 200 come along – aw man, wish it was that easy. The show made just \$1000!

The promoter spent 40+ hours working on this minimum: liaising with bands, cell phone calls, organising backline, promo and production, organising interviews, spamming social networks, running the show on the day (being there from 1pm sound check through to 2am) and going back the next day to collect gear. Now I don't know many promoters in this country who actually pay themselves properly, shit I never do. Of the 100's of shows I've done I've probably taken a cut from half a dozen. Usually shows barely make enough to cover production costs.

Lets say the show made \$1000, and the promoter takes a 15% cut (unlikely) which works out to around \$3 an hour for the amount of work they put in. The promoter gives \$500 to the 'headline' act (who probably only play every two months) and splits the remaining \$350 between the two other bands.

I'm not going to break down how these costs grow even larger when touring, but I'll just say that you add on van rental, bigger promo budget, food, petrol, ferries and everything else. You are always going to get some bum shows, so more pressure is put on the successful shows to make the tour break even.

\$5 shows HAVE TO STOP NOW. If a band has come to your town from another city, even if they are only asking for \$5, pay more, please.

Hey look, if you're throwing a house party and you're prepared to spend your own money to make the show free, that's cool. I'm actually really into free shows – I do 'em all-the-time, they are a great way to expose new acts or as special events. However, as soon as a \$5 tag is stuck on something, it's given a value, and in my mind that is hideously undervalued.

#### HOW CAN YOU FIX THIS?

If you're a punter, just don't pay \$5. If a show is \$5, pay \$10. Bands: \$10 should be the minimum. If no shows go under \$10, then suddenly \$15 and \$20 shows become a reality. Venues: don't let bands charge less than \$10 for shows, it just ghetto-ises your venue.

If you still want to let in broke buds, do a \$5 doorlist. Charge \$10 to everyone except those you know are broke, put them on a list and charge them less.

It's pretty clear from this book that I have a firm belief that the establishment of decent DIY venues all around the country is what's going to really make a difference heading into the future. What I'd like to see is these venues from the start charging at least \$15 for shows. If people can bring their own booze, well, they're still saving money big-time. This way \$5 can go to the venue and \$10 to the bands. This way you start creating more of a sustainable scene with venues actually getting money to host these shows so the clean up the next day isn't so crappy and depressing and to cover the use of the PA etc, but still the bands get to walk away with \$10 per person after costs of using the DIY venue.

It's a model that has to exist, it's the only way to create a sustainable DIY scene but it needs education of the people in that community to understand that they're paying \$15 not only because that is still cheaper than a movie and cheap for a nights entertainment, but they're paying because they don't have to pay *bar prices* for drinks.

Chapter 9

**LIVE MUSIC VENUES  
NEED TO TAKE MORE  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR  
THEIR OWN FUTURES**

Most venues in NZ are a little confused. No other way to put it. I regularly book shows overseas. At the time of finishing this book I've booked four international tours visiting 20+ countries. New Zealand is the ONLY country where I am asked to pay venue rental, and it happens too often. On my home turf and where the band will have much bigger shows than overseas!

How can a venue justify charging a band to play? If you are specifically a 'live music' venue, your 'suppliers' are musicians. You would not exist as a live music venue without your suppliers. What other industry charges their suppliers? It's not the supplier's responsibility to make your business work. If you cannot create a successful business you need to rework your business model. Maybe you're overstaffed? Overheads are out of control?

I can understand if a not-for-profit/community venue that showcases very low profile and 'art/experimental' acts that bring in small audiences need to charge a small fee to cover staff costs if the show is a flop. There are only a few of these venues in NZ.

What pisses me off is that venues expect bands to make sure they never have a bad night, as opposed to hiring good bookers. Let me break it down...

For a live music venue to succeed they really need to capitalise on Fridays and Saturdays. They can't afford to flop on these days. So they may decide to charge a band playing on a weekend \$300 a time. This would equate to \$2400 a month, enough so that one dud night a month is not as painful as it could be. So, what happens if that dud weekend never happens? Shouldn't the bands get their money back? Anyway, why should a band be paying just in case the venue has a flop that is some other band's fault?

NZ is weird.

There are 'premium' venues in each city thinking to themselves "Well, we are more fancy than everyone else, we need to charge". Um, really? If you are a better venue you get bigger/better bands play at your venue. It doesn't mean you suddenly start charging. I've been to humble venues overseas that make every venue in NZ look like rubbish, however some venues in NZ think that because they have working subs and a mirror in the toilet that it makes them super special.

When I question a NZ venue hire I usually receive the same response: “Well, we have a lot of overheads. We are supplying a PA, security, we have bar staff to pay, sound check, etc.” Um, aren’t those the costs of being a music venue? Don’t get in security, I don’t care.

When the ‘premium’ venues (wow, you have a PA and some lights) start charging it screws the entire scene because slowly other venues start charging too; convincing themselves that poor management is not to blame for their problems.

Venues need to sit down and work out how to make shows successful and take some responsibility for the running of shows. Make sure shows run smoothly, that changeovers are fast and shows end at a reasonable hour. Work out why people aren’t coming to shows and work out how to get them back. Don’t just book the night and let the bands do what they will. If a venue doesn’t have the right team to make this work, get a new team.

If a venue charges a band rental then the band will have less money for promo. If having successful shows is the plan and you have some good ideas about promo, how about instead of venue rental you ask bands sign a contract that says they’ll spend ‘x’ amount of dollars on a particular type of advertising that works for your venue?

Venues need to get on a level playing field with bands, we’re all in this together.

I’m not trying to make out that the venues are the bad guys. I’d say overall, bands fuck up promoting and running shows more than venues do, but this happens because venues don’t get involved enough in the running of shows. As I said, we need to get venues and bands on the same page. Bands take money from the door sales, bar takes money from the booze sales. Bars who get pissy because they are sick of “taking risks” on bands need to begin to understand the industry they work in. Don’t just trust the band who emails you and says “We get 200 people along to our shows whenever we play,” because odds are they don’t.

Venues need to identify who their audience is, they need to understand how to reach that audience, how to present shows that make that audience attend. You can’t just respond to an email from a band and say “yes, you can play that date” and then just hope that everything goes to plan – venues need to take the success of shows into their own hands.

Venues that are successful are ones that have bookers who understand the music scene. It’s not rocket science, if you’re just a pub owner trying to have bands play at your venue and you have no idea what’s going on in your local or national scene, of course your venue is gonna fail to have good acts at it and successful nights.

What can you do about it if you’re in a band? Well, if you are asked to pay venue hire, challenge why. If you desperately need the show ask what it would take to get it back at the end of the night (like if the venue has a successful night)



and make sure they stick to it. Ideally you should boycott those venues and go elsewhere. If everyone did this it would definitely get their attention. It's all about supply and demand. DIY.

Most importantly music venues need to take their future into their own hands. Forget the short term fixes of letting bands do cheap shows, having massive door lists and playing late. Encourage sustainability, nurture bands and treat them well so your venue becomes their home – aim to assist with building careers for the musicians you work with. Work on ways of attracting new audiences by making sure shows happen at reasonable times and professionally – spend less time worrying about what booze to sell and more time making sure your shows sound amazing, look great, run well and people have a great time. Get hands on, take responsibility for the proper promotion and running of shows – go to shows at other bars so you can see who the good local bands are, pay attention to what is happening in the music scene and be proactive with booking. Chase after bigger bands and make sure you pair them with good local bands – always keep the future of your business in mind and the growth of the community and development of young bands as a key priority.

Chapter 10

# **PLAYING SHOWS TO NICHE AUDIENCES IN A SPARSE POPULATION HAS DIMINISHING RETURNS**

This is the crux of it really. I left this essay to last because it sums up everything. This is why forging a sustainable career making original music in New Zealand is so difficult.

There is nothing to really compare it to. There are no other compatible English speaking markets that are anything close to NZ. The musical markets most similar to ours, Australia, The UK, USA and Canada are all totally different to us and all offer avenues for artists and creators to build careers. (Though I'm sure many Australians would disagree – it's a far-sight more possible than it is here)

When we're growing up we have this bizarre idea that New Zealand is a small country geographically, we know by world standards we have a small population, but we never really consider just how unique our country is. Our land space is large, larger than the UK, only marginally smaller than Japan yet our population doesn't even compare with only 16 people per square kilometre<sup>1</sup>, compared with 253 and 337 respectively in the UK and Japan.

There is just simply no way of hiding this, we're kinda fucked. With things how they currently are in NZ it's practically impossible to build any sort of career, regardless of what genre you play in – the ceiling is just too low. It doesn't matter if you're making pop music for the radio and getting thrashed or making cutting edge (shit, I hate that term) records and are the current indie darlings, it will feel good for a while – you'll assume that as long as you keep making good records you'll simply grow your fanbase, unfortunately that is not how it works.

Why I have grouped bands playing all sorts of music in this one essay is that in NZ I consider mainstream radio to still be niche. There is just simply not enough population here to be able to support bands throughout their career. Radio in NZ is a funny thing, radio audiences do not often translate to the live arena unless your radio hits are appealing to university students. The biggest radio bands in the country who don't have any appeal to that all-important 18-23yr old douchebag demographic just can't get people to their shows. Even bands selling multi-platinum records are relegated to doing summer tours through drunken

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<sup>1</sup> Mundi Index

hotspots to disinterested youth with nothing else to do or jumping on “winery tours” playing to disinterested middle-aged folk with nothing better to do or hold out for festivals like *Homegrown* (an economic lifeline to most “past it” kiwi acts).

Stuff all people go and see these bands headlining shows at actual venues unless they’re super special one-off events. I remember feeling even more smug than usual when in 2004 I was doing a show in Auckland where I’d sold out the *Kings Arms* with a couple of local bands and down the road *Elemeno P* whose album a year earlier had sold 45,000 copies couldn’t sell out a venue half the size. Back then I used to have a real “us against them” mentality when it came to music scenes, it was only after years of touring and seeing how depressing the NZ music scene could be that I really started to feel shitty for many of the things I’d said in early issues of my zine, or ways I’d bitched about NZ pop bands. It’s pretty stink when you sell a bucketload of records like that but can’t pack out venues in your hometown.

There is simply no translation between being huge on the radio and it meaning anything in the real world, and the problem with becoming gigantic on the radio is people who discover you that way have no real attachment to a band, no true emotional response. They’ll listen to the record, but don’t really care about seeing you live in person, don’t care about buying your future records, merch or supporting your career. They just bought the album cos they liked that song they heard on the radio.

If you play too many shows in NZ, you just bore your audience and you suddenly see how small the country is. At your peak when your album is cranking you manage to pull off the 20 date nationwide tour, getting reasonable turnouts, maybe playing a few town halls, some theatres, some large venues. Pity you had some stupid idea of “looking and sounding impressive” on this tour because you thought it might mean something and lay some “good groundwork” for future tours and you idiotically hired some expensive production company to take care of everything and after a successful run of shows end up in debt or making stuff-all. Pity that was your one chance of really making some cash.

Now you’re just on the scrap heap with everyone else.... Waiting for the summer so you can try scrounge as much cash from the NZ summer festival circuit and other one off events funded by booze companies and sponsored up the a-hole, maybe you might generate some more interest in “album year” with your next record, but that’s a few years away and when you take into account the actual time spent on that record and the amount of money spent, well, half a dozen reasonably well paid shows are not a huge pay off, and odds are you blew any money you made on an ill-informed attempt at “breaking” an overseas market with no infrastructure or backup in place.

Having medium success can be even more depressing, there is a ceiling you just can’t break. Those who are luckier and manage to have a “hit” record, ie: one

that sells 2,500-10,000 copies will enjoy that few years of larger shows, but they'll eventually just be back to where they were a few years earlier, except now they have management, booking agents and others taking a slice and you're stuck trying to work out what's going on. Because you can't overplay in NZ you limit your shows to once per main centre per year, but you charge \$25-30 a show. Rather than when you used to play half a dozen times for \$10 a show. So now you're playing less shows and not enjoying being a band as much, again just hoping for festivals, trying to sync your music (place it on TV or movies) – but now that the television and film industry have realized everybody is desperate for “syncs”, they've started paying less for usage.

Unless you manage to cross into the mainstream all that happens with your profile is year after year less people are interested, eventually you'll break up or if you do manage to have a mainstream hit you just alienate all your old fans and you'll lose your new fans soon enough cos they don't care.

Sucks.

It's a pretty depressing read and well, it's a pretty depressing time. The last few years in NZ have just been getting worse and worse. Our industry is simply fading away – when I was releasing albums in 2007 I had a huge list of media that I could contact to do stories on bands, that list has dwindled to an embarrassing number, and due to the proliferation of a billion average bands on the internet getting their albums put out, well, there are just far too many bands clambering after the limited support that remaining media can offer – this equates to bands putting out records and nobody ever hears about it.

One story for me sums up the depressing state of our industry. A short while ago I was visiting the Wellington public library when I walked past a performance by *Amira Grenell*, who was giving a free performance. She had at her feet a sign advertising that she was the winner of the 2012 *Folk Album of the Year* at the *Vodafone NZ Music Awards*. Next to this sign was a little briefcase with a handful of CDs in it and in front of her, 3 or 4 elderly folk seated who I think simply felt too awkward to move away.

This is the problem in a nutshell. In a country with an actual market, winning “folk album of year” would probably mean something, it could be what you'd call a “big break”, but in New Zealand? My heart was breaking when I heard her finish her set to a polite applause from some old folk and then heard her try to peddle her CDs. Where do you go from there? Isn't winning the music award for your genre of music meant to mean something? Isn't that the pinnacle of your career? Shouldn't you expect more than four retirees to come along and listen to you for free when you perform in your country's capital city?

We need to activate the current population to stimulate an interest in music. How many people do you think on any given weekend engage with sport in this country? Imagine if just a fraction of that same population had an interest in seeing/hearing local music? This division was never highlighted more clearly

than one night in 2004. Once when I was touring *Degrees K* we played a show at *The Dux De Lux* in Queenstown. This venue is laid out very strangely. The bands are sort of “hidden away” and though they are still in the same room as the rest of the bar, they are placed behind a large fireplace and it was free to watch the band. The main room was full of people waiting to watch the rugby on the screen at the bar, starting *after* the band. There weren’t more than a handful of people who could even be bothered making the effort to even peer around the fireplace to see this band who were on top of their game and had just played a jam-packed show the previous night in the venue’s sister venue in Christchurch. The *potential* of seeing some ant sized figures run around a field in a pattern only slightly dissimilar to the previous weeks showing was much more appealing than the opportunity of seeing real energy and emotion right in front of them. This needs to change.

The audience for music is shrinking. The ways to reach that audience are shrinking. There are not enough music fans in this country to sustain an industry. Music in NZ is as niche as you can imagine. Years ago when I was running *A Low Hum* as a music magazine available only at shows, there was a brief period where I entertained the idea of making it a *proper* music magazine and getting into retail, but it dawned on me how few people are interested in a seemingly big industry. There are several locally produced magazines dedicated to *pig hunting, cellphones, boating, fishing...* I mean, music magazines struggle to sustain themselves but we have multiple magazines dedicated to railways? What is going on?

Conversely we’re also at the most exciting time ever. Music can reach all around the world like never before. We can build audiences around the world without leaving the garage. The potential is limitless, there are fewer barriers than ever to someone with talent getting out there – it’s just, ya know, wouldn’t it be nice to be able to have a career in music at home without HAVING to look overseas or work other jobs?

This can happen. We need to create more scenes throughout the *whole* country, so bands can tour all over, playing successful shows throughout it. Bands need to be able to tour yearlong, not simply to get better and to earn money, but to enjoy being in a band. We need to put up the price of live music. We need to take music out of being predominantly in bars and let it happen everywhere – engaging more audiences, playing in environments that all can enjoy, not just the drunk. We need to play more shows to those of all ages, building and developing audiences for the future. We need to get people used to paying for shows by removing doorlist culture. We need to stop relying on the government and instead fund our musical endeavours by building communities willing to support our projects. We need to get better. We need to make sure industry responsible for paying us do so and transparently. We need to create new media, build radio stations online, exploit publicly aired music, grow gig guides, zines

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– build communities. Everything we think about as lovers of music should be about how to get more people interested and passionate about music – more people coming to shows, more people buying albums, more people loving music.

There is a problem with music in New Zealand, but we can fix it.

# **WHY I STARTED AND RAN PUPPIES**

*Ian Jorgensen*



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Chapter 1

# BEGINNINGS

## MVP BAR

In 2007 before I even started writing my *Problem with Music* book and touring overseas I'd become quite jaded with the way I'd seen New Zealand venues operating throughout my previous four years of touring the country. I had a theory that I could take a totally random space which had never been a venue and within just a few months turn it into not only an essential place to play, but treat artists better than any other venue at the time.

The goals were pretty lofty and I committed to booking three months of shows at the venue. My plan was simple. Find a venue that could supply food to the bands so they received meals each night. I'd make sure there was no venue hire. I would supply a PA for free, supply an engineer and I'd organise poster design and sticking up. The bands would go into the show with ZERO costs, every single cent taken on the door was distributed amongst those playing and they'd get a sweet meal too.

Booking the shows I also had a system as well. I booked a residency for the Saturday night shows, so one band would headline 4 weeks of the month with different supports each time, and I created a club night for the Thursday night with several DJs, and left the Friday nights open for different acts, it was hugely successful.

The shows took place in a bar called *MVP* which was in an area of town that was quite dead in the evenings meaning the bar was dead as well. I got a good deal on the PA rental by committing to three months rental, and by offering an engineer three nights of work a week I got a good rate too -- especially given that it was a pretty easy job in a small venue.

Each night (Friday and Saturday) cost around \$300 to put on. Roughly: \$50 posters design, \$100 engineer, \$75 PA rental and \$75 poster plastering.

If I did it now, I'd do it for cheaper. I was pretty fresh back then and just went with what the PA company said for the installation -- even though what we had was overkill. In a room that was about 100 capacity, I would now just throw a couple of powered speakers, a sub and a couple of microphones. Committing to three months (or more) of rental, I'd really beat them down in price and offer to use their most beat up speakers (every PA company has one of these sets, a couple of ragged looking 90s powered speakers that have been treated like shit, but they're totally fine for what I would have needed). I also wouldn't

have bothered with street plastering (*Facebook* has rendered this sort of small campaign redundant). Plus, if doing now, I'd probably just do sound myself – I think learning how to wrangle a basic vocal PA is essential knowledge for anybody working in the music industry – from bands to managers to booking agents to bar owners, everybody. It's pretty simple piecing together a basic PA and making a band sound half decent – of course, I always prefer having a trained engineer behind the controls as they truly know what they're doing, but it's important to have a basic understanding of the process.

Given that I was only booking essentially one night of entertainment a week plus organising the monthly residencies it wasn't all that time consuming for me. I took a space where nobody ventured in the evenings and very quickly it became a popular space for bands and had many packed nights. There were some shows of course that lost a little bit of money, but there were enough great nights that it evened out.

After my three month project had ended I stopped booking. I thought I had created an obvious template, but without someone really proactive and making shows happen, within a few months it had died.

## PUPPIES

In 2009 I finished the first draft of my essay collection *The Problem With Music In New Zealand (TPWM)*, where I suggested some changes we could make to build a healthier, stronger New Zealand music scene. I felt that if I released the book as-is it wouldn't be taken seriously. Even though I'd already road-tested some of my ideas in earlier projects these weren't publicly documented, so I needed to put my money where my mouth was and open my own venue to try out some of my ideas.

The whole concept was to take a space that wasn't working and try some fresh ideas with it. To respect both public and musicians, to create a sustainable model of a venue to prove that it was very possible to succeed in a struggling market with novel ideas.

## LOOKING FOR A VENUE

I had my eyes on two spaces in Wellington, one was the venue that was at the time *Medusa* (now *Valhalla*). I think this has the potential to be one of the best spaces in the country – it's a great size and amazing sounding room, easy to pack out and for me has so many great memories of amazing shows in the early 00's when it was called *Hole in the Wall* and then *Valve*. The other dream space was where *Fringe Bar* (now *BRU*) was on the corner of Cuba and Vivian – it has amazing foot traffic and would be easy to make work as a bar. I was limited by

budget though and while I sat patiently and waited for those businesses to sell up (as was inevitable when looking at how they were running), the bar *Happy* went out of business first.

I had never really been looking at *Happy* seriously as a venue. It is very off the beaten path for Wellington, more than just a simple stroll from the principle nightlife and I knew that I would be writing off foot traffic at that space. It's a destination venue, not just one people amble to after they've been out for dinner – it also has a notoriously terrible pillar in the middle of the venue – as do all good basement venues.

The bar had scraped by for years and it was seen as Wellingtons “small venue,” – ya know, the one you play at if you don't have a big enough profile to play at one of the more *serious* venues. It was neither the tiny venue I wanted like *Medusa* or with amazing foot traffic like *Fringe Bar*. It was less than ideal – a fairly large space that is perceived as small that has no foot traffic.

*Happy* was started by Jeff Henderson and a group of Wellington musicians as a follow-up to the venue “Space” in Newtown. It was the home of the Wellington experimental scene and a venue which would give artists who wouldn't otherwise have had an opportunity to play a space to do so. It eventually became the home of the indie scene, but was supplanted by *Mighty Mighty* and had struggled since.

This offered a new and exciting challenge to me – taking a space so engrained in the public consciousness as a venue that “small” bands played at and presenting really big acts in it – a complete image overhaul through sensible management.

The landlords didn't want another bar in the space. They'd been burnt for years by late or non-payment of rent by both the bar in the basement and also the restaurants and dance studios on the floor above the bar. They were extremely dubious and hesitant to take me on, though after some arm twisting and the fact the space had been empty for four or so months prior and they agreed to sign me up to a two year lease. I'd only really wanted to do a year, two years was pretty scary and longer than I'd wanted to commit to this project, but I realised a year might also not give me enough time to prove I could make it work.

I negotiated a graduated rent deal in the contract so that it was three months after opening before I was paying the full monthly rent of \$2683. This gave me an opportunity to spend a little bit of time getting things sussed out.

Before opening I spent a good time working out what battles I was trying to win with this project. It was different than when I did the *MVP* project. I had to create something that other venues could use as a model so I had to make it financially successful while also treating bands and the public with an all new respect. Using TPWM as a guide and also a whole bunch of other issues I saw existed I worked out how I wanted *Puppies* to run. The next chapter breaks down all the core philosophies behind how I ran the bar.

Chapter 2

# CORE PHILOSOPHIES

## PLAYING TIMES

As I broach in TPWM, a major issues with live music in New Zealand is the wild west attitude of management around bands performing at any regular or reasonable times. In TPWM I'd come up with the idea of repeating the same show twice and though there are elements to this I really liked I just felt that this was too big a concept to try and that others simply wouldn't take it on at this stage. I settled instead on a compromise, still doing two shows in one night, but different.

It became a rule that bands playing at *Puppies* would need to advertise their playing times in advance. Where possible (and in most cases) on the poster, but certainly on any *Facebook* event set up for the show. I also wanted shows to be over by a reasonable time, which I felt was midnight. It's amazing to me that in NZ that was not already the status quo, but unfortunately most shows regularly run till 2am or later.

## DOORLISTS

Expansive guest lists have become a huge problem, I got rid of them. Generally, I only allowed band members 1 guest each. I just wanted people to have more respect for the show. I didn't want a culture of people feeling like they were better than others, I wanted a level playing field.

I've always felt stink for people standing in a queue when a person in front of them is getting in free because they were "on the guest-list". This is rude and makes other people feel they are not as respected at the show. I appreciate *everybody* who makes the effort to come out and pays the artist the respect of buying a ticket, so I have no intention of making people feel less special.

I made exceptions for shows with some of the "older" acts and some internationals who were doing rare performances who I knew would want to put extended family etc... on lists, but if it were bands who played fairly regularly, I was strict. Again, this is quite a huge attitude change from other venues who just give bands full control of this – even to their detriment.

## NO \$5 SHOWS

I think in the history of *Puppies* we had maybe 4 or 5 shows at \$5. These were only shows that were pieced together last minute and I'd either forgotten to tell the band about my policy of no \$5 shows, (I never made this policy public) or

the show was organised with only a few days notice, so I made exceptions. I still had plenty of free shows, and I used these to introduce new acts or the occasional special party.

My plan was to introduce more local shows at \$15, but just establishing \$10 as a minimum for shows was work as it was. I am hoping in future I have the balls to start doing more local shows at \$15, even if it impacts turnouts at the start, I think its massively important to building sustainability that the cost of shows start rising very soon, if something like 20-30% of local shows were \$15, then suddenly \$10 would become the new \$5.

### BACKLINE SUPPLIED

Something that always perplexed me about NZ venues was their inability to supply backline for shows. Backline is the equipment a band uses and can include drumkits, guitar and bass amps, keyboard stands etc...

On the stage at *Puppies* I have a “house backline” of one drumkit, two guitar amps and a bass amp. What this means is that I become a first choice for many touring bands. If a band needed to hire that same backline from the main Wellington backline company, including drop off and delivery, it would cost around \$450 for one night. If you’re not going to hire backline and instead borrow, it is often a pain in the ass begging around friends of friends, asking the support acts etc, and you never know if the gear you’re gonna get is any good.

Supplying a house backline took that worry from bands minds and meant that I was able to book the better bands around and save them a bunch of money.

Buying a house backline isn’t that expensive. My house drumkit, a *Gretsch*, I purchased for \$1000 off *TradeMe* around four years ago, including snare and cymbals. That kit has been used at every *CALH* since and for almost every single show at *Puppies* other than the electronic shows. I’ll be able to sell that kit for around what I paid for it when the time comes as it’s still in reasonable condition - that’s the beauty of most backline gear – if you buy it second hand, when it comes time to sell, as long as you buy decent equipment, the resale value generally stays the same.

The most expensive piece of equipment was probably the bass rig which cost around \$2k for both the amp and speaker, but again, I will lose nothing on the resale and if you get decent solid state amp you won’t be likely spending any money on repairs (as I didn’t). Maybe over my entire backline I’ll lose \$1000 in resale value/repairs at most over the course of two years of use and being that I’ve hired out some of that equipment to other promoters/venues over the course of having it, I have actually earned money on it.

It’s a small initial investment (which you will get back), but not only gets you access to a whole bunch more shows with better bands, it makes sound-checks go WAY faster (keeping engineer happy), makes sure your shows sound good (you know you have great equipment), makes bands very happy (not having to lug



gear around) and makes you a promoters first choice for shows since they know they're gonna save several hundred bucks a show.

If NZ venues supplied backline, it would have made my life SO much easier when I spent all those years touring NZ, and you know what, I always would have chosen the venues which supplied backline over those who didn't, every time – it's the principle reason when why booking shows in Auckland I'll go with *Whammy Bar* or *Wine Cellar* because I know there is always some backline floating around or Rohan might help source some, unless its specialist stuff.

## NO VENUE HIRE

Venue hire is becoming increasingly common in New Zealand. A very bad trend. I wanted to prove it was unnecessary.

## DOOR CHARGE PER NIGHT STAYS INTACT

A silly culture in NZ with door charges in that throughout the course of a night it keeps getting reduced to compensate for the amount of bands who have already played. For example if a show starts off being \$10 for four bands, maybe after two bands have played that will come down to \$7, midway through the third band it will come to \$5 until say midway through the final band when it is like gold coin entry. This always pissed me off when I ran the door at shows, I would always feel shitty for the last person who paid \$10 after I had to reduce the charge slightly and it bought about a bargaining culture where people would turn up late and just assume that their entry could be negotiated.

I always felt this was a gigantic slap in the face, especially when somebody turns up drunk and I know they've just dropped \$30 on drinks at a bar before coming here and they're trying to weasel the bands out of a couple of bucks.

At *Puppies* the full door charge was in place right until the last song played. Sure sometimes this was kinda embarrassing asking for when there were only a couple more songs to be played, but it's not my fault they couldn't get their act together and arrive on time. Again, it's a case of bars/bands thinking short term and not of the damage policy like that has on the future. Once somebody realises they can save not only \$5 on entry if they turn up late, but they can drink at home so save more money, well, you've written off that person ever contributing to a healthy music scene.

It's a bars responsibility (for their own livelihood) to nurture a scene, this means getting people out to see bands early so they can see the support acts. If people know it's irrelevant what time they show up they will still have to pay the same cover charge, they are more likely to come earlier.

## CHEAP DRINKS

One of the toughest battles to win is getting people to stop pre-loading at home and to get them to come out to shows earlier. The only real way to do this is to have an un-missable band open, but let's be frank, there are not that many bands who everybody wants to see who can play first on a bill – if everyone wanted to see them, they wouldn't be on first.

So you need incentives to get people to shows early. One way some venues do this is discounted entry if people arrive early, unfortunately this doesn't work so well as people are wise to the fact that at nearly all venues bands don't start till late anyway. It may have worked at *Puppies* where people knew we run to time, however, I was more focused on raising the price of shows, than discounting to get people out earlier.

I also thought rather than the bands pay the cost of getting people out early as what would happen if a discounted door charge was in place, it was the bars responsibility.

I had this idea of scaling my drinks prices, ie: selecting one or two products per night and altering the cost of these per hour.

For example, a house beer might be:

\$3 at 9pm,

\$4 after 10pm,

\$5 after 11pm,

\$6 at 12am, and then start reducing,

\$5 again at 1am,

\$4 at 2am etc...so as to encourage people to stick around.

I was all ready to go with this system, it worked in with my concept of free entry after midnight at which point the drinks on the bar were the most expensive. I thought the idea was pretty sweet and was all set to go, I pulled out a few weeks before opening though as I saw some potential issues with host responsibility<sup>1</sup> and there being rushes on drinks just before each hour ticked over.

Instead I just decided to have my overall drink prices cheaper than everywhere else, not irresponsibly so, but enough that expensive prices weren't a deterrent for people coming out. I thought it *my* responsibility to get people to shows and if we had to work harder at the bar with smaller margins, it was worth it to get more people along.

My original idea on products at *Puppies* was very inspired by *In-And-Out-Burger* in the US. On their menu they have two options, the hamburger or the cheeseburger. I wanted something similar – 1 beer and 1 wine. I was looking

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<sup>1</sup> Running a bar according to liquor laws, preventing intoxication and making sure your customers are safe and looked after.  
[www.alcohol.org.nz/legislation-policy/host-responsibility](http://www.alcohol.org.nz/legislation-policy/host-responsibility)

into cans as I really liked the idea of people just sticking their hand up and me throwing them a can – though not only would this result in cans exploding in people’s faces and multiple accidents but also in breaking *on-license*<sup>2</sup> liquor laws selling unopened beverages – it was a nice vision while I had it though. Also, though I opened with a totally stripped back bar – 4-5 different beers, 2 wines and 5-6 types of spirits, shit, you try running a bar in Wellington without selling craft beers.

Though I expanded the menu while we were open, I always kept it cheap and simple – I didn’t want people’s focus to be on the bar.

## FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE

The venue was designed with the performances as number one priority.

So often where the bands play at a venue is an afterthought. At *Puppies* we spent months designing how best to use the problematic space. We worked hard to make the room sound as great as possible. On the other hand, what stock to sell and how to display it/sell it was barely considered. Utilising projection is a great way of having bands look great and how to have the environment look different night after night for a cheap outlay. \$500 on *TradeMe* scored me a 5k (powerful) projector with a spare bulb.

I knew it would save me money overall by avoiding having to spend a bunch of money on lighting and also, save me having to find operators to run light shows all the time by having a sweet visual set-up, so I measured the maximum throw (how wide I could get the image) from the projector and built a stage to measure. I also knew it was quite a rarity for a venue to have dedicated projection that filled the whole stage and where a visuals artist could just walk in, plug in and be operating with no set-up, so again, for minimal (or potentially zero) cost there is another huge selling point<sup>4</sup>.

For all the opening shows at *Puppies* I implemented a “video feedback” system where I’d purchased a crappy second hand video camera and sat it on-top of the projector pointing at the band and shooting its own projection, causing an infinite loop. Looked amazing some nights. I didn’t want it to become a “thing” though, so changed up how I was using projection through the course of the venue.

I built the stage with Brett (*Puppies* doorman) and we put carpet everywhere, all over the stage and on the walls behind the stage. A very simple way of

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<sup>2</sup> An on-license is an establishment where people drink on the premises, ie: a bar or restaurant as opposed to an off-license where people take alcohol away, like bottle stores and supermarkets

<sup>3</sup> If you want to have a diverse range of shows eventually the drinks range needs to reflect the diversity of clientele

<sup>4</sup> Search “The End of *Puppies*” on *Youtube* to see examples of how the *Puppies* stage looked with projection

acoustically treating the room that made it sound way better, absorbing unwanted sounds and giving engineers more control. I have so many vivid memories of arriving at venues and the only place where the bands could play was in-front of windows or brick walls – cue ear shattering, annoying sounding shows.

I wanted the stage as clear as possible, also, I didn't have all the money in the world to open the bar so needed to use my existing PA that I owned to fill the room. I only had two small monitors, just two 200watt powered speakers. Instead of using these like the majority of venues and placing them at the front of the stage and blasting them at the knees of the performers we flew these from the ceiling where the sound they produced cover the whole stage. I managed to go the life of the venue without getting any additional monitoring, not even specific monitoring for the drummer (drum fill) and this wasn't a case of me being a cheapskate, but it sounded great up there.

Ask any band who played at *Puppies* and they'll tell you how our onstage sound was among the best in the country – and this was all generated through two tiny powered speakers – just using them right.

I hid the subs (large bass speakers) under the stage also, this gave a very clean line of sight, so when visuals were in place, the stage looked and sounded great. Having a great “house engineer” (a sound engineer who maintains the system and mixes the majority of the shows) is desperately important. I've worked with James Goldsmith for years doing many shows together before *Puppies*, and he was as important to the venue as anything I did.

Having a reputation for being a good sounding venue is of utmost importance. I didn't care that we weren't particularly a good place to drink, I did care that bands told other bands how happy they were with their sound, that people who attended shows told others how great shows sounded. I believe everything comes secondary to this. I was always nervous whenever James didn't mix, thankfully over the course of the venues lifespan this was maybe only a dozen or two times (not including a number of electronic shows which I would mix myself).

## NO AFTER WORK DRINKS

So this is a tough one. Much of a bar's livelihood is down to this reliable income – especially on Fridays when they need to be able to remain open from 4-8ish to cater to a regular drinking crowd. When touring with bands, fitting in around this was sometimes a TOTAL pain in the ass which venues didn't seem to understand. They will want you to finish sound-check before 4pm or else start after 7pm (even if you're opening your doors at 8pm). Touring to any city in this country, even from Christchurch to Dunedin is a full day's drive when you take into account food/toilet breaks etc. To make it to a bar by 1-2pm for an early sound-check is very difficult unless you're flying and even then, a pain in the ass requiring early flights (ruining the whole point of flying).

If you're driving and on tour, having to get up silly early just to make a sound-

check because of this reason, it totally kills your buzz – doing it late and you end up having a rushed check after 7pm and because these same venues are unlikely to supply backline, you’re having to set-up all your gear and mic everything up (place microphones on all the equipment) and then rush through checking a few bands if lucky before opening the doors.

I understand that for some bars these after-work drinks is a lifeline, they’re just a pain in the ass for bands – so I tried to create a model for a venue which wouldn’t *need* to open for them. Also, geez, screw having to listen to people bitch and moan about their lives every week.

If I could find a space in future where after-work drinks could happen on Fridays and sound-checks could still happen without being affected, I’d go there, I’d just have other staff work ‘em.

### NEVER DOUBLE BOOKING

One of the most important things to me was to never double book a show. This is all too common a thing at some venues around New Zealand where they’ll often take a booking for a local act but if a better offer comes along they’ll just cast that original booking aside in favour of the “better” show. I’d had some really painful last minute cancellations happen to me and friends in the past, some as late as a week before the show – and being I’m not the kinda guy who can bother getting a contract signed for every little thing that happens in my life – I just had to take it up the...

After eighteen months booking experience for the bar, I don’t despise those bars who did so to me “as much” now, as I can see how from a financial point of view it can mean thousands of dollars to a bar. I still think people who look at industry as “Show Biz not Show Friends” are short term thinkers though.

There were quite a few times I had to turn down good money shows, but even thought it was tough at the time, I’m so happy that I never ended up fucking anyone over.

In late 2012, the day after *thecorner.co.nz* uploaded ‘Royals’ by Lorde I sent “her” an email. It was the freshest song I’d heard in quite some time and I did something I’ve only done a handful of times, and asked “her” to play at the following *Camp A Low Hum* having never seen a live performance (of which there hadn’t been at that stage). I never heard from Ella directly, but received an email from her management. Unfortunately *Camp* was out of the question as she wouldn’t have a live set ready in time, but we talked about her first ever show being a live set at *Puppies*. Originally the idea was to do a late “1am mystery set”, her management loved this idea – they really wanted her to play to real music fans (I guess this was simply part of their then “strategy”) but they wanted me to fork out for five return airfares and accommodation in-exchange for a free performance of which I couldn’t announce – and at the time, really, fuck all people even knew who she was.

At the time I found their confidence pretty incredible, but I guess they were proved resoundingly right in that eh. When we agreed to just do a regular show and not a *mystery set* we got to penciling in some dates, by this time I'd been moved from one manager to another manager and then onto a NZ booking agent. I penciled in a date, it got cancelled, penciled in another date, that got cancelled...when they finally got back to me with another date (May 10th, 2013) she had well and truly blown up, had a US booking agent, and it was obvious the show was going to sell out in a second.

They only gave me a few weeks notice about this new date and I'd already had a booking, for the *Muzai* 5th birthday and there was no way I was gonna bail on a dude like Benji even knowing I'd lose a huge show – so the show went to *Mighty Mighty* – though I'd spent six months working on it, I was a little miffed, but ya know.... That's how it goes.

While I was miffed I'd spent 6 months having to deal with several managers and booking agents just to lose the show, I didn't really care about it that much – though a significantly smaller bar-take, I would have much rather had Benji and *Muzai* any night of the week – the double booking that REALLY hurt though was once when I'd taken a booking for an Auckland band for a Thursday night. I didn't think much of it at the time, I knew nobody would come to that show, but being a Thursday I didn't really care and I'd taken the booking before I decided not to do Thursday nights anymore.

Quite some time after I'd taken that booking I had a promoter get in touch with me who wanted to put on a three day mini-festival thing at the bar – I'd worked with this promoter before and always had huge shows, I knew all of those nights would be well attended, but the problem was he needed the Thurs, Fri and Sat at the one venue. At that stage my weekend was free, I shot the existing booking an email to see if there was a chance they could move – but sticking to my philosophy, I didn't push them, they couldn't...and I lost I reckon around \$5k of bar sales over the next few days.

I tend to just look at the funny side of that stuff – there really is no other way. On the Thursday night the band played, as I suspected, stuff-all people turned up and as so commonly happens on a Thursday we didn't even cover staff costs of opening – I had to put on my best “I'm still happy” midweek empty show face.

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<sup>5</sup> Benji Jackson of local NZ label *Muzai* is a dedicated, passionate lover and tireless supporter of local music

THE SMALL THINGS

A GREEN ROOM.

Even though crappy, I provided a space where bands could stash gear and get away from it. You'd be surprised at the amount of venues who don't supply such a small thing. I understand why, it's tough. I probably could have rented out that room for \$1-150 a week, but instead had it empty to get used for just a few hours on the weekend. To be honest though, I'm kinda too useless to bother renting it, so would have never done that anyway. In the green room I had a small fridge which I placed the bands rider each night so they didn't have to come to the bar when they wanted drinks. Generally the rider was worked out to be around three beers per band member, though when a bunch of members and lots of bands, this capped out at 2 dozen, at a cost of around \$40 per night to me. Not a huge expense, but considerable over the course of the venue's life.

FREE WI-FI.

Holy shit do the international touring artists appreciate this. I know all too well how handy this is.

SET LIST PAPER.

The last few months of the venue I didn't realise we'd run out, but when we first opened I placed a gigantic stash of paper in the green room and always had pens floating around. The ridiculous crap I've had to source in the past while on tour for bands to write set lists on, serviettes, old newspapers, old fliers, old gig posters etc...

A PRINTER.

Seems such a small thing, but Christ, it used to drive me crazy when on tour and traveling the country and needing to print out the days ticket sales and finding out the venue didn't have a printer, so I'd have to find some internet café or something that was still open so I could print out a couple of sheets of paper. Most hard out tour managers travel with printers so they can print out such things and stuff like tour itineraries, but I'm not one of those people – I can't even spell itinerary without spellcheck, let alone ever bother making one.

BRICKS.

I can't even think how much of my life I spent trying to find things to keep kick drums from moving during bands performances. If you've got a hard kicking drummer it's very often that the kick drum will keep inching forward. This is overlooked so often and bands have to improvise on the night, just shoving a guitar amp in-front of it or looking around for something heavy instead. Probably

the cheapest of all my “good host” concepts and not even needed all that often as I had a good house drumkit and carpeted stage – but shit, all that goes out the window when you have a Ryan Bennett (*Cartoon*) or similar behind the kit.

### EMERGENCY KIT.

I have this kit I have put together over years which includes so many of the things you end up needing at shows. Putting together a kit like this probably only costs a couple of hundred at most but will save your ass 9 outta 10 times. I used to pride myself on having everything a band could ask for:

Included in the kit. *Capo, Hi-hat clutch, 9volt batteries, pedal power supply, patch cables, instrument cables, kick pedal, replacement snare and kick heads, RCA-Jack adaptors, Cheap guitar tuner, USB cables, RCA cables, RCA to mini jack cable (several), snare, guitar strings, country adaptors (ie: USA-NZ), step down transformer, PC-MAC video adaptor, drum key etc...*

### KEYBOARD STANDS AND WOOD SHEETS.

The amount of times me and *Disasteradio* have had to improvise at venues for things to put electronic equipment while touring is ridiculous. Most bars hate to give up their tables too cause they want them for their customers to put drinks on so kinda look at you blankly if you ask to use one. This is pretty easily solved by having a couple of keyboard stands and a variety of different sizes of wood panels to put equipment on. I also had some dedicated tables made for electronic shows.

### TOAST.

When I opened the bar, I'd bought a Crock Pot and the plan was that once a week on a Thursday I'd make a chili or curry and have this sitting in the green room for bands to help themselves from over the weekend. I was too lazy though and never got my A into G, but instead, threw in a toaster and a loaf of bread and some spreads, this got gross when not maintained though.

### SLEEPING STUFF.

When bands are on tour, especially from overseas, they love nothing more than to have a lie down while waiting for things to happen during sound-checks and even during the show. I made sure I had a couch in the green room that was capable of someone stretching out on, even had a foldout couch in there that could sleep two as well. These were utilised quite a few times. I kept some bedding at the bar as well – just some cheap duvets and pillows.



Chapter 3

# **IMPLEMENTING POLICIES AND EXPERIMENTS**

I believe there needs to be a considered decision behind everything you do. Every little thing I do at *Camp A Low Hum* has a ton of thought behind it, analysed to death to be for all the right reasons. When I signed the lease to the bar, I didn't do anything with it for two months. I got some notebooks and spent two months writing down idea after idea, cementing exactly how I was to run the bar, even spending months considering something as simple as the name.

#### THE ORIGIN OF PUPPIES

I'd given myself two months to come up with a name but did so in the first few days. *Puppies* met all the criteria I wanted in a name. I spent two months trying to think of a name which also met that criteria, but my other options were more idiotic, ie: Tuxedo's (yes, I realise grammatically that would imply it was owned by someone called *Tuxedo*, that was the point)

I used the following criteria, placed in order of importance behind choosing a name:

The name needed to be shortish but not too short. Posters and graphic design are very important to me. I hate when designing something and being presented with a name that is only a few letters and it screws up your design, I also hate names which are too long. Names like *San Francisco Bath House*, *The Kings Arms*, *Jetset Lounge* – these are all too long and inevitably get shortened by the punters. I thought the best names were always short and snappy, like *Whammy*, *Sammy's*, *Bodega* and funnily enough, *Happy*. A name that looks good on a poster, is unmistakable and can only be spelt one way (wasn't confusing like Hamiltons' *Sohl Bar*).

I'm probably one of the worst victims of nicknames, for most of the past decade my life has been spent working my festival, which just gets called "Camp", completely removing my entire brand. If I was the type of business who cared enough to see their brand removed from something I'd probably be concerned, but I have never worried that much beyond fascination with this habit.

I wanted the word to look good. I always liked how *Whammy* and *Happy* looked on posters. The repetition of letters made for a really attractive word as

opposed to a *Bodega* or *Refuel*.

All bars get some sort of shortening/nickname applied to them and I wanted to be fairly in control of that (though you never can be – it's the beauty of nicknames – trying to create it yourself barely ever works). I.e: *The Kings Arms* gets called The KA, *Mighty Mighty* gets called Mighty, *Bodega* - The Bodge, *Chicks Hotel* – Chicks etc.. Though *Puppies* was short already and asking to have the mickey taken out of it (The Dog, The Bitch, Boobs etc..)

When *San Francisco Bath House* first rebranded from *Indigo*, they issued a statement with what nicknames were allowed. I always found that hilarious. From memory, approved shortenings included *San Fran* and *The Bathhouse* – as a reaction to this, quite a few of us in the scene simply called them “*Frannys*” as we knew it would piss them off. Previously to *SFBH*, we made a habit of calling the venue by its full name “*Indigo Bar and Grill*”.

I've always been fascinated by the idea of sub-consciously forcing a nickname, so did so right from the start by assigning the opening shows of *Puppies* all catalogue numbers, i.e: PUPS003. I would also every now and then call it “Pups”, but not all the time. It worked to some extent with a number of people definitely referring to that, but almost to my disappointment, people simply called it *Puppies*.

As well as wanting to experiment with creating a nickname, I also liked the idea of using a word so commonly associated with something and to see if by the end of the bar's life that if within the music scene you had ownership over that word.

The name worked superbly by pissing off some and having others love it, like any successful name should. That it worked so brilliantly on *Facebook* by having “So and So likes *Puppies*” whenever somebody “liked” the page was a wonderful side effect. I knew being that people in NZ do love a good bitch (I'm one of 'em) that there would be a number of people wanting to bag on the venue from the get go, so having a name where somebody would sound like a knob if they said they hated it was also part of the plan. This came about when I laughed when I heard someone once say “I Hate *Happy*”.

I messed around with numerous names over the two months - nothing seemed to fit all my intentions. One other name came close.

## SHAPES

I spent a while working on this concept of calling the entire space “Shapes” – though this would barely ever get used, it was simply me having a private laugh at one of my favourite old rave expressions “throwing shapes”, the bar itself would be called “Squares” and the record shop would be called “Circles”. I liked the aesthetic that all this conjured up, however, I really wanted *Puppies* to be a dive bar and be trashy and kinda shit, it just felt that those names suited somewhere

slick and minimal in appearance, also, they are really wanky.

The whole “shapes” concept stemmed from my an idea of calling the bar “Hipsters” just to bait haters who I knew would associate so-called hipsters with my bar. I’ve always just seen these “hipsters” as nerds; the people at school who were uncool and buried their heads in the headphones. I fledged with the idea of calling the bar “Nerds”, which evolved into “Squares” and never ended up being used.

Part of the concept of calling it *Puppies* was to name it that and then never have any reference to dogs or the like in anything to do with the bar. I was exploring the look and shape of the word and wanting to give it a new meaning, but I was too stupid to even consider that *Puppies* was slang for breasts (though, let’s be honest, what isn’t?) and it wasn’t until I announced the name that I saw someone make the connection – so I ended up using some puppy imagery in advertising just to make it clear we weren’t a strip bar – which we were mistaken for a few times, seriously.

#### WEEKENDS AT PUPPIES – THE OPENING SHOWS

So the ultimate dream for any venue is to be a kick ass drinking bar as well as a live music venue, somewhere people go to drink as well as watch live music. This sort of venue is common overseas and even quite easy to set-up for example in Australia where many of the music venues are in old pubs which usually have multiple rooms. It’s easy in this sense to create a killer drinking area in one space and have another room dedicated for shows meaning no compromises.

Hardly anybody in NZ has the space to attempt this. The most popular venues in the country are just one room bars with stages in them. The closest any bars get to blending drinking and live music successfully are *Golden Dawn* and *Cassette* in Auckland, *Mighty Mighty* in Wellington and *Darkroom* in Christchurch, however they all fail nailing it for various reasons. I failed too, so I’m not being a bitch here, it’s more difficult than I anticipated.

At the end of the day a venue needs to put their livelihood and sustainability as absolute priority, where the other venues compromise so that the bars work better as a drinking establishment than a venue is a matter of life or death for them and I certainly don’t mean to imply they’re doing it wrong.

All those venues are great to drink in, but none of them are *that* particularly great to play in – they don’t want to lose their regulars – which is fair enough.

The simple fact of the matter is that people attending live shows don’t drink as much as a pile of people in their 20s/30s with discretionary income out to get drunk and laid.

This was highlighted many times for me, but not so glaringly as one night

when I had a private party for 100 or so people from 5pm-8:30pm one night. We did around \$4k in sales in that period which is a really good number for my bar. We then kicked everyone out and I opened again from 9pm-1am for an indie show which attracted around the same amount of people but we only did \$1.3k over the bar which was lower than average, but closer to my regular figures.

It's pretty simple really, if people come to your bar to drink, they come *to drink* – they will always have a drink on their hand, and their priority is to get drunk – if people come to your venue to see live music, that is usually their focus, often they might just buy one drink when they arrive or just watch the band, or just drink water. Usually the better the band, the less they drink.

So how can you manage to balance the best of both worlds? I thought I had it pegged and I got CLOSE, so close.

When I signed the lease I immediately started booking my opening shows. I wanted to open with ten weeks of killer gigs, right from my opening night of Oct 12th through to Christmas. All those shows were to fit the same format. Doors at 8pm, first band at 9, second at 10pm, third at 11pm and show over by midnight.

I was then going to have a second free entry show start at midnight with a DJ and a mystery act play at 1am and then the DJ again afterwards.

Ideally I'd wanted a venue where I could have a separate venue and a bar in separate spaces, because that wasn't possible I decided to separate the space into a venue pre midnight and a drinking bar after midnight.

This was A LOT of work. Because of some previous negative experience at bars around the world who have after-parties kick in after shows and the bummer that this is for the bands when you've just finished and some dickhead starts dropping drum and bass, I worked very hard to try and find DJs who would really complement the first shows.

This worked most of the time but there were just those few shows where I had to be an asshole that broke my heart and I always had to be this dick to the more popular bands as they were playing the longer sets.

I had it well established that the venue became free entry after midnight, and even though I was doing well at making shows run on time, I wasn't finding out in advance how long bands were playing for and not adjusting accordingly... a simple failure to a great system.

What would happen is when you'd have a headline act start at 11pm and play over an hour, I'd end up having a bunch of people arriving at midnight wanting to come in and a band still on stage, I'd then have this bottleneck of people wanting to leave while others wanted to come in and this insane changeover where a DJ starts playing while the band are packing down – something I was ALWAYS super embarrassed about.

When you've just played a great show, once you finish you just kind of wanna just bask in that glow a little ya know, talk to some people, wind down – not have some dance party kick off.

I was a victim of the success of the concept. Word had gotten well and truly out about the bar being free after midnight and we were getting good numbers of people turning out, but I was slacking off in the management of this and not getting bands on earlier when they were doing longer sets.

After one too many times when I felt shit turning what should have been a nice chill post gig comedown into an episode of a band trying to exit through a throng of party kids I couldn't do it anymore, I was selling-out too bad.

The two gigs in one night thing worked well many times. I'd say 70% of the time it went off without a hitch. I think in essence the plan was almost perfect and If I did a bar again where I couldn't have a dedicated "band room", I would keep the same premise, free entry after midnight, I'd just make sure I got clarification exactly from bands when their sets would finish and I would stagger the bill accordingly. I would make sure that the bands were always finished by 11:30pm and that from 11:30-12:30pm there was a chilled out vibe as the first show wound down before I kicked in the next show properly.

Initially I was trying to have people stick around from the first show into the second party, thus having the second shows start early, but upon reflection of how it worked, I shouldn't have bothered – just having two very separate gigs works much better.

I had from the start made this big thing about bands playing at 9, 10 and 11pm. I wanted it to be jammed into people's minds. I hadn't really thought it through properly but there were nights where we had say three punk bands all sharing the same backline and playing short sets so what would happen is a band would play from 9-9:18 and then there would be this 40 odd minute wait till the next band! By fixing one problem (keeping strictly to playing times) I had unwittingly bought about another huge peeve of mine – long changeovers.

Without experimenting or trying out the idea, I'd announced ten weeks of shows and playing times and was stuck trying to make the system work.

I fixed this problem later by changing the schedule to suit the bands and not actually sticking with my silly, 9, 10 and 11 plan. I just simply announced times that suited and allowed a reasonable amount of time for a changeover. Easily fixed but felt like a giant douche not anticipating that it could be a problem. It really killed the momentum of some of the earlier shows at the bar.

## POSTERS

My *A Low Hum* shows over the years had been well known for their poster art. I had been working for years with amazing illustrators creating incredible posters – it's one of my favourite parts of putting on shows – however, I wanted *Puppies* to launch looking like no other venue around, I also wanted a clear way of showing many of the new philosophies clearly when it launched, so worked on designing this template for a poster inspired by an old favourite 90s rave poster (*Some samples on following page*).

I am also not a fan of “celebrity” and headliner culture so I flipped this (literally) on its head and designed myself a basic grid which showed clearly what times acts were playing, kept names the same size and even had the last act of the evening on the bottom. I was also able to use this grid to clearly show the two show concept and also introduce the various philosophies.

This worked well in so many ways. One of the major issues I talk about in TPWM is how venues leave too much up to bands on the success of the show. This simple design took poster promotion right out of their hands. I was able to bang out those grids as soon as I had finalised the line-up and as all the posters fitted the same template I had on hand a collection of already commissioned art all ready to go – and being that designers had to implement no text or information onto poster – they were able to do the “Borders” as I called them very quickly. It means I'd have a poster a few minutes after confirming a line-up, not having to wait on a designer. This got promo happening much faster.

I was so happy with this concept and it worked brilliantly, however, sticking with my philosophy of trying concepts in just three month periods, I ended it abruptly and didn't do the template again after those initial shows.

I bought back a similar concept in late 2013 when I launched the *Square Wave Festival* series of shows. This time I commissioned one designer to make a series of 30+ posters that needed to work together as a set and I specified that the artists etc needed to be laid out sort of similar to those original *Weekends at Puppies* posters, artist names all the same size, with playing times etc. I wanted to just see what the designer would do, and Hadley<sup>1</sup> being a genius took the concept and made a revolutionary set of posters I'm so super proud to have been involved with. (*Some samples on following page*)

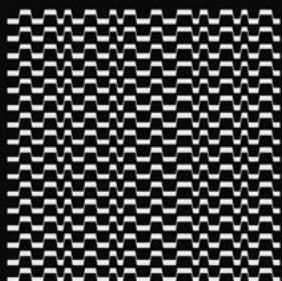
So – nailed the posters, failed on the 9, 10 and 11 specific playing times.

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1 Hadley Donaldson, illustrator and designer. <http://hadleydonaldson.tumblr.com>



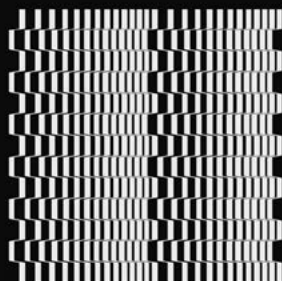




HEATSICK (TUE) 10:00pm  
GOLDEN AXE (FRI) 10:30pm  
SAM HAMILTON (SAT) 10:30pm  
WAYAS 11:30pm

SQUAREWAVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC FESTIVAL  
PUPPIES - WELLINGTON  
NOV 22 - DOORS 8PM - \$10/16  
TICKETS FROM UTA.CO.NZ

[WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ](http://WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ)



KRAFTWERK VS DAFT PUNK  
TRIBUTE NIGHT

GOLDEN AXE (FRI)  
RACE BANYON  
GAMER EYELINER  
LAVENDER (SAT)  
+ MORE

SQUAREWAVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC FESTIVAL  
PUPPIES - WELLINGTON  
NOV 24 - DOORS 8:00PM - \$10  
TICKETS FROM UTA.CO.NZ

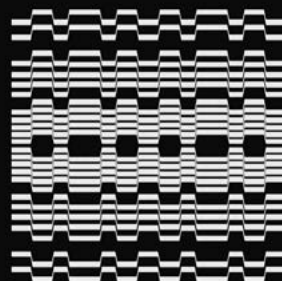
[WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ](http://WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ)



ALBA (FRI) 11:30pm  
PIKACHUNES (SAT) 10:30pm  
JON LEMMON (SAT) 10:30pm  
MAJOR NAPIER (FRI) 10:30pm  
ZACHARIAH BELL 11:30pm

SQUAREWAVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC FESTIVAL  
PUPPIES - WELLINGTON  
NOV 16 - DOORS 8:00PM - \$10  
TICKETS FROM UTA.CO.NZ

[WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ](http://WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ)



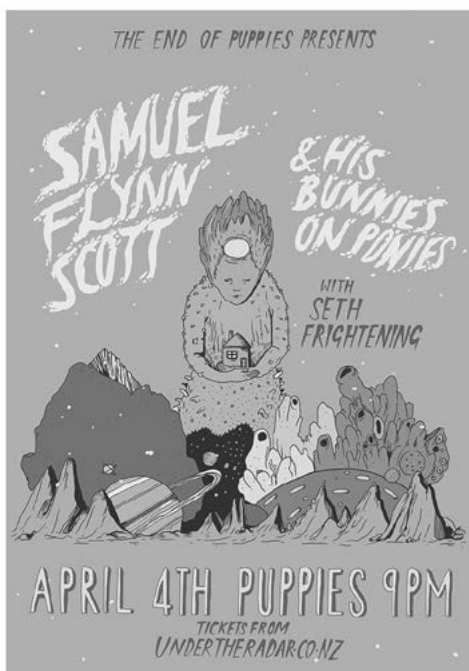
LATE SHOW  
SQUAREWAVE X VANGUARD RED

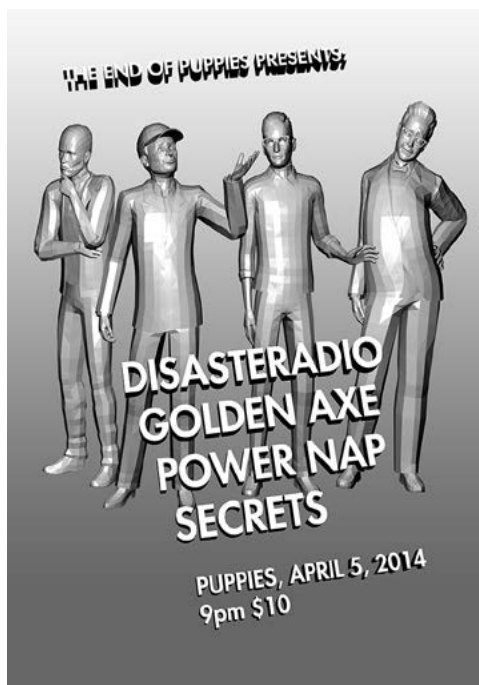
RACE BANYON 12:30am  
GIVEN NAMES (FRI) 1:00am  
RIKI GOOCH 1:30am  
VANGUARD RED DJs

SQUAREWAVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC FESTIVAL  
PUPPIES - WELLINGTON  
NOV 29 - DOORS 12:00PM - FREE

[WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ](http://WWW.SQUAREWAVEFESTIVAL.CO.NZ)







## LATE NIGHTS AT PUPPIES

The idea of trying to build a successful drinking bar and venue was important to me, and the “Late Nights at Puppies” concept was one I’d worked on for a while. Even though I am not a fan of booze and its effects on society, I was not trying to establish a model of a successful DIY venue at this stage, but create a model of a financially viable music venue that treated bands and the public well – to make this work, having it work well as a bar was pretty important.

The premise was simple: free entry after midnight and a great bill of entertainment every Friday and Saturday night including DJs and a “mystery live act”. Like the *Camp A Low Hum* concept of not announcing acts to get along audience who might have not come otherwise because of not recognising a name worked brilliantly.

The mystery act concept was a complete success, I didn’t want to do again as I loved that it was just a small part of the history of the venue and didn’t want the concept to die – as it inevitably would if I had flogged it to death. There were regularly a whole bunch of people who would turn up at 1am to see the act – though I got sick of friends who would keep texting me every time asking who it was.

I continued the 1am live act and DJ thing though most of 2013 however announced the act in advance.

The late night concept worked well, but its success was backfiring – the bar had come under real attention from the police as we’d have a whole bunch of people hanging outside early in the mornings. For the following reasons reasons, I ended the late night shows.

As described above, sometimes where the band from the first show would play an epic set (which is totally within their rights) it would bleed into the second show and I’d have to be a dick to the bands which was a downer every time for me.

With the introduction of the new liquor laws coming in late 2013 police and with the various licensing authorities coming down much harder on drunkenness on licensed premises – since the only time we really had people pushing their

limits was our late night parties – the constant threat of huge fines over my head just wasn't worth the money the nights were making. Getting raided almost weekly had me not feeling confident in leaving another Duty Manager in charge so I committed to working every hour the bar was open and I was quickly getting *over* the late nights.

It doubled the booking workload for me having to do a second show every weekend night and with my workload increasing at the end of 2013 with *Camp A Low Hum* on the horizon, organising these late nights just didn't work for me.

I got a new girlfriend and suddenly the appeal of staying out at the bar to 3:30am just wasn't there anymore.

Money schmoney.

The potential income was there and If I do another bar in the future, I will definitely look at doing something like this again, as well, most importantly, damn son – some of those late nights were amazing and me and those at them had an awesome fucking time.

Changes I'd make would be: I would only have live electronic acts play late at night, ones who can run through a DJ mixer – to avoid having to pay for an engineer to hang around. I would find a Duty Manager whom the local police loved and who nailed the job so I didn't need to be there every night plus I would get resident DJs so people knew what sort of music to expect when they rolled up. For example, maybe pop bangers on Friday nights and house/techno on Saturday nights. This would get boring for the staff, but this is all a drunk public want – repetition. I should have realised that the pre-midnight shows were enough to exercise my artistic demons and desire to have interesting stuff happen, the post-midnight shows should have just been about making bucks – it's to my own detriment I don't care enough about money.

The problem with doing a short term project like this that you can't be assed making steps to really improve the situation, ie: Had I made even a modicum of effort to install an outdoor drinking area, applying to the council etc, installing some outdoor seating, man, those late nights would have made a killing – especially attracting people walking past – but just like my disinterest in putting up a sign – I didn't really want that many people at the bar, it was working fine as it was, paying the bills and me a decent wage - I was too focussed on stuff I really cared about like *Camp* etc to bother spending any more thought process about how to maximise profits at the bar.



## CRITICAL MASS

This is the secret to being a successful drinking bar and having a night go off or die. It fascinated me watching people's habits. When we were open late, if it was an early show that had barely any crossover with the late show, the room would often be quite empty before it turned 12 and this it when it got interesting.

Drinking bars fill up their space with tables and chairs – the rooms already look semi-full and when punters walk into these rooms they can sit down and have a drink while waiting for other people to arrive.

*Puppies* was a bunker. I had two tables with 8 chairs, 2 bar leaners and a couple of couches. I really couldn't be bothered moving furniture constantly and restaging the room every time between early and late shows and I didn't want to just leave a bunch of tables out permanently. This meant that come midnight, often the first people to arrive would walk into the room, it would look empty, they'd see barely anybody there, look around and then leave... this would usually happen until 12:45am, we'd often get something like 100+ people coming in and then leaving again because the party looked lame – those arriving after 12:45am would usually stick around as they knew we'd have a live act at 1am, and that's when we'd start achieving *critical mass*.

At *Puppies* we'd need just twenty five odd people to make the room feel good and come alive. As soon as we had that many people locked into hanging about, the room would soon fill and we'd have a party on our hands, as soon as it fell below that number again, the party's days were numbered.

People want to be where the party is at, irrelevant if they're enjoying the music or the show, if there aren't enough people around, there is that nervous panic that maybe there is a better party happening somewhere else.

I was fascinated watching this, seeing people getting itchy feet, their inability to hang around and wait for a party to happen. My absolute favourite memory of this was only a month before the venue closed when I threw a typical late night party. I'd advertised it as starting at midnight, though probably a dozen or so people arrived as early as 11:15pm – as such, they walked into a dead room (me and staff were still setting up) and were almost in a panic, with one girl getting really agitated asking where all the people were.

I explained that the party was starting at midnight. They decided to hang around. When at midnight the DJ started playing, they left within the first 2-3 minutes as in their minds they must have thought that the party was dead being that it had started and it wasn't cranking. Within 20 minutes, the party was going off and was, as usual, a great time.

Achieving *critical mass* was this huge issue with me when I first opened. I entertained briefly the idea of finding a group of 20 odd students who I would

offer two free drinks to hang around the bar from 12-12:45. At a cost of around \$80 of stock it was a small price to pay, and having that number of people hanging around the bar was ALL we'd need to guarantee critical mass every night. I freaked out though at the idea of word getting around that I was "paying people" to come to the bar as people wouldn't understand the delicate nature of it, and how it was an experiment in human nature for me just as much as trying to create a financially kick-ass model.

I thought of several specials to get people along to the bar at 12am, but none of them would guarantee me a captured group of people. I regret not at least trying this concept of 20 people getting a couple of free drinks every single late night, it would have worked easily and guaranteed every late night party would have worked – but, I didn't care enough about making those late nights work better.

If you want people to hang at your bar and drink you need to create comfortable spaces for them to do so, chairs, tables, soft lighting (so everybody gets laid). Puppies was never that, I was pushing shit up hill and I didn't even want to be at the top of the hill, especially covered in shit.

#### LICENSING AND ME

One of the reasons I wanted to do the bar was to understand more about how licensing worked. I actually enjoyed the process of red tape I had to go through to get the license and bar open. It ended up costing me more than I suspected in going through the process (if you're going to open a bar make sure you explore the full costs in getting a license in place) but was worthwhile.

Over the course of running the bar I found some glaring issues with liquor licensing in this country. I don't give a crap about that industry though so won't be writing a book "The problem with selling liquor in New Zealand", but found some shit pretty funny.

#### RESTRICTED VS SUPERVISED LICENSES.

This is one of the most overlooked areas of a license. The majority of places that sell booze are *designated*, this specifies exactly who is allowed on the premise. A "restricted" area means that if you're under 18, even if accompanied by a parent or guardian, you can't be on the premises. It doesn't matter if you're not drinking, you can't be legally on the premise unless you're doing one of a few exempt jobs ie: Cleaning or preparing meals.

Now, this law *sort of* makes sense. Even though in most cases you could argue it's up to a parent if they want their child on a licensed premise or not, well, licensed premises aren't always a safe and responsible place to have someone

under 18, and this law I assume protects children from irresponsible parents.

Funny thing is, I don't even know if cops know the difference – it just makes so much sense that if a parent is there with their child that it should be fine.

At *Puppies* we had a “supervised” license, I think, the only bar/live music venue in Wellington with one – this meant that we could have under 18's present with a parent. It is absurd that “performers” are not an exception along with cleaning and meal prep. It is ridiculous that someone under 18 cannot perform at a “restricted” bar even with their parent present. This wasn't an issue for me personally so didn't get up in arms about it.

I'm pretty sure this law is to protect kids whose parents can't find baby sitters, not to stop 16+17 year old bands playing in bars, if I could be bothered I'd fight the law to see that performers were added as an exception to those allowed to work in a bar under 18, but I care more about DIY venues and all ages shows than getting kids playing at bars.

The flouting of that law I just found funny. That people who work in these bars often don't know the details of their license cracks me up, but there is one double standard that is ridiculous and it's the very core of every bar's business.

## ONLINE LIQUOR SALES

In late 2013 Puppies got nailed for serving alcohol to an underage person. At that point I was having my security start thirty minutes after doors opening – as really - stuff all people turn up to shows just after doors opening. The police did a sting that night and sent in two older looking seventeen year olds who were served by my staff. I took full responsibility for this. I was mortified. It was my being cheap and starting my security late that had stopped that check process, and my lack of communication with my staff on their responsibilities led to them not ID'ing people once in the bar. Though I wasn't even on the premises when it happened, I blame only myself.

What the police did was classic entrapment (*breaking the law to catch someone breaking the law*), and though in most countries around the world this sort of action from the police is illegal – a precedent set by a judge in Taihape so far deems it OK in NZ until someone fights it.

Anyway, I didn't have a beef, I was embarrassed about the whole ordeal and worked closely with the cops over the next few months to ensure we were back on the straight and narrow again. We only got our hand slapped – the duty manager had their license suspended for six weeks and we had to close for one days trading. The cops know that if they imposed the full penalties for breaking this law they could potentially be sued for entrapment, so just impose penalties that while teaching you a lesson, aren't worth launching into a court battle over.

It was the only warning I needed though, afterwards I had security on every minute the bar was open and endeavored to have better communication with my staff.

It was through this experience though that I started looking more closely into



the law and discovering an outrageous double standard.

Before allowing a person into a licensed premises, let alone *buy* alcohol we have to aggressively ID people. There are only a few types of ID accepted and in no way will we let in anyone without this relevant proof of age.

To buy alcohol online in NZ all you need to do is enter your age into the site. “telling” it how old you are. This is the only check. Yup. Just input any old age you want and you’re free to purchase alcohol and have it delivered to your house.

The only other thing you need to do is use a debit card or prepaid gift card to pay. To get a debit card you need to be 15 years or over, to get a prepaid gift card you need to be 13 or over. If under 18 you need a parent to sign when you first get the card from the bank, but after that it’s open season.

So that’s it, the only age verification check is when someone gets one of these cards. That’s it, and all it’s doing is verifying that they are over 13. Once they have the card all the kids need to do is input fake information into the website – lie about their age, and we’ve all done that.

There have been several reported cases where kids have been caught out buying liquor online because their parents ended up intercepting the package. I mean, if you had a 14 year old kid and received a package from *The Mill* addressed to them, you’d ask questions right?

In probably the most hilarious cases I’ve read about was in mid 2013 where *The Mill* got called out for delivering booze to a 17 year old<sup>2</sup>... their defence? The General Manager of *The Mill* accused the parents of raising their child badly and their child should have never lied when he told the website how old he was – a process as complicated as clicking on a button confirming he was over 18.

A kid lying to try and get some booze? Yeah, I bet that’s the first time that’s ever happened.

This “strict” determination of the age or a purchaser is determined by the following clause in Section 59 of the *Sale of Liquor Act 2012*.

*(3)The holder of an off-licence must take reasonable steps to verify that the buyer of any alcohol that the holder sells by remote sale (and, if a person other than the buyer is to receive it, to verify that the receiver) is not under the purchase age.*

Why is the verification process any different to sales that aren’t remote?

Going by this *rigorous* identification process, all we should have to do as an *on-licence* is have a sign above the door to the bar stating “By entering this premise you are over 18 years of age”. That’s it. I’d save a ton of money on security if so.

Is just having someone click on a button that says “I’m 18 or over” and/or having them enter their age into an online order form really “reasonable steps” to verify? I’m sure nobody under 18 has ever checked out a porn site by clicking

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/9463982/The-Mill-sold-vodka-to-underage-boy>

on the button saying they were 18 right?

Now, I'm not trying to argue that this should be the case for bars, I'm just upset that off-licenses aren't held up to the same standard and scrutiny as we are, and why? Because it would be too difficult? That doesn't really seem to be an appropriate defence to allow flagrant breaking of the law.

## BEING A DUTY MANAGER

Being a Duty Manager sucks. It's a wild west out there with the law. In 2012 with the new liquor act the police came down hard on bars and made their presence known. Now, I'm all for this shit, I hate alcohol abuse, but the law is so subjective it's ridiculous.

One of the largest fines<sup>3</sup> you can receive is "allowing a person to become intoxicated", for this a manager is liable for a fine of up to \$10,000. The distinct problem with this is there is no definition in NZ law for what "intoxicated" is, and even more disturbing than that is on the Ministry of Justice website<sup>4</sup> they defend this simply *"it is not practical to include a definition of intoxication in the Act, on the grounds that greater flexibility is available to enforcement authorities without it."*

Greater Flexibility? This is the problem with this law. It is completely subjective to the Police officer checking and could come down to their mood.

Some of the "signs of intoxication" include "tired", "asleep", "dishevelled".

Being a Duty Manager you're responsible for monitoring all the people on the premises, and I accept this responsibility, I take it very seriously and thankfully with the nature of my business (live music venue) we don't get much abuse happening here, especially since we stopped our regular late night parties, but really, having that \$10k fine hanging over your head on a cop who got out of bed on the wrong side is seriously intense. My paranoia over having a grumpy cop led me to totally restructure my business model and end regular late nights at the bar.

It's an intense role and people can become intoxicated VERY quickly. For example if somebody arrives already having had a few but not showing it and then comes to the bar and orders a shot and a chaser, they then head to the toilet and sneak some booze from a hotel sized bottle they stashed in their undies and then head to the dancefloor while their friend buys them another drink – in a matter of minutes, they could be at a level determinable by any cop to be intoxicated, and all the intoxication happened out of sight of the bar.

Regular drinkers are wise to these laws and know when they look drunk – the only way to truly patrol this is to not allow people to buy any more than one drink at a time, banishing rounds – but even then, they could just buy one drink

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<sup>3</sup> [www.drugfoundation.org.nz/alcohol/law-and-penalties](http://www.drugfoundation.org.nz/alcohol/law-and-penalties)

<sup>4</sup> [www.justice.govt.nz](http://www.justice.govt.nz) (search "definition of intoxication")

and take to their *getting intoxicated* friend.

I've always found it unreasonable to make a Duty Manager purely responsible for people taking the piss (literally) in their focus on getting as drunk as possible.

Much more responsibility needs to lie in the hands of the person drinking. I completely believe in much of what it means to be a responsible host and looking after your patrons but I believe that if you are selling drinks in a reasonable manner (this doesn't include pouring shots directly into people's mouths as they lay their heads back on the bar) and look after them, then, as long as the person is of drinking age, it should be about personal responsibility.

We often end in this familiar quandary with finding people who we deem to be intoxicated or on their way and we need to remove them from the bar as if they're found on the premise we'll get nailed with a fine – however, they aren't finished with their evening yet and don't want to go home, so won't let us call a taxi for them plus their friends want to stay at the bar and finish the show – so we end up in this situation where the responsible thing to do is for us simply to keep an eye on this individual, make sure they don't have any more booze, drink lots of water, have some food and wait for their friends – but instead there is this fear that a cop won't believe we're taking a responsible route here and dish us out a fine to the letter of the law – so we have to boot these people out of the bar – so we've just put someone who was in a safe environment which we could monitor, into an entirely unsafe environment.

## ALL AGES SHOWS

When I was doing the *A Low Hum* tours throughout 2004-'07 there existed a part of the law which allowed you to change the designation of your license temporarily for a small fee. What this meant is that I was able to host all ages shows in bars with a few restrictions – most notably paying the fee and doing the paperwork and covering any booze and booze signage/advertising.

Doing all ages shows is really important to me (*TPWM*) and though yeah, I'm sure there are a small portion of bar owners out there who abuse this and use it as an excuse to get kids into (and used to) their establishments before they turn 18, but for me it's always been about being practical and by removing venue and PA hire I was able to do a ton of shows which would have otherwise been a financial disaster.

Anyway, the possibility of removing your designation (at least in Wellington) is no longer possible as I discovered shortly after opening the bar killing my plans to do one killer all ages show every month.

Part of me wanted to fight this, but I was weary that yeah, this system probably could be abused, and better than waste time petitioning for a policy change, probably spending that time trying to find venues to do free or cheap-as-chips hire and PA companies to support all-ages shows might be a better plan.

## THE INTERNET

I messed around with a ton of experiments at *Puppies* over the course of the twenty months. Many of these were in the little 4mx4m room at the front of the venue I decided to call “The Internet”

I wanted a name as ridiculously common as *Puppies* but that represented something gigantic to make fun of the fact that the room was so small. I also liked that when asked where people were going, they would need to reply “The Internet.” Anyway...

My very first use of the room was as a record store. There wasn't any part of me that wanted to have a record store, I just wanted a couple of things. Firstly, I wanted people as soon as they walked into the venue to know that we were about music first and foremost, not booze, and secondly I wanted to provide something to do for people during breaks and like one of my favourite venues around, *The Cake Shop* in NYC, I loved the ability to just go and browse records during band changeovers.

In these areas the record store was successful, however where it failed was that during really packed shows with lots of people coming and going through that entry way it became impossible for my staff to monitor both the people coming in and out and also keep an eye on stock. I could have employed someone specifically to look after just the store, but I didn't really care enough about it to push it as a store and continue ordering new stock etc. Wellington has some great record stores and it was never my intention to compete with them, I just wanted to try out the idea. I think a record store attached to venue is a great concept, however, I think it works much better in a set-up like *The Darkroom* in Christchurch who are in the same building as *Galaxy Records* whom open up for busy shows. I didn't have the passion in selling records to run it day to day and it really required that sort of passion, not an afterthought.

In future, in looking for a new space, I would certainly look for an area where I could encourage another compatible business to open up next door or under the same roof. Even a small spacey parlour would have been cool (and was a shortly mooted idea for the space too).

As the months of the record store ran by it got pretty frustrating and I saw that more and more people were hanging out in the space but not really browsing or buying, just hanging out. I decided one day to just pull all the records out of there and move some couches in and turn it into a chill out lounge instead. This worked awesome and people filled it out all the time, so much so we started exploring the options of putting another bar in there – however, due to the added staffing costs and set-up costs plus the fact that it took people away from the main room – which really was the focus of the venue, I flagged that idea.

Had I wanted to really make *Puppies* a hard out-drinking bar, I would have made

that room super choice to hang out in.

Wellington has for years lacked that really small intimate ace space for some late night drinks, and since I could have made this space separate and free to enter, there was the possibility of really making this work financially, however, fuck that....I'm always more interested in throwing parties than making money, so instead found me some cheap powered speakers off *TradeMe*, threw 'em on the wall and put bands in there instead.

The legality of having it just be a "chill out" room was sketchy also. Because it wasn't able to be viewed clearly from the bar area, it meant it would have to be staffed constantly to keep in with the license conditions – this wasn't really possible with it just being a room with some couches in, so that idea died.

As a venue it launched mid April 2013 and was way more fun than a record store, the first unofficial show in there was *Signer/Introverted Dancefloor* which was just one of the 1am sets that we decided on a whim to throw in the small room.

A week later, *The All Seeing Hand* played the first advertised show in there and as is always the case with that band, was overly dramatic, with the performance lit only by candles placed all around the room (still cleaning that wax off a year later...).

*Puppies* really came into its own during this period. I had kind of let the venue go a bit the early months of 2013 as I focused on CALH, but back into the bar fulltime and excited about shows in that space, I was excited again.

During the few months I put bands in there, we had some epic shows. This was a time when I was super proud of the venue and for a short while was toying with the idea of keeping it running. Just walking around the venue some nights with both rooms jumping and going off I would glow with pride – I couldn't think of any other similar music venues and everything had just come together.

The place felt well and truly alive and though this excited me no end, I also knew this was exactly why it had to come to stop. I hate it when things fizzle and die. I've always tried to end all of my projects at their peak, before people get bored. Running *Camp A Low Hum* for even as long as I did scared the heck out of me. I've never been short of ideas, so sticking with one for so long worried me. After seeing just how great *Puppies* was when it was in full swing, I knew I had to end it. (*I announced publicly October 2013 it was closing – as I felt I should tell my landlord first*).

There were obviously issues with running two venues under the one roof, sound bleed was an issue, but since bands and the public had gotten used to our strict times - this wasn't often trouble and I'd program it real sweet that when we were doing epic two room parties and when acts were playing at the same time as each other – that it all worked, the other main issue was that it was uneconomical to have two engineers working, especially when the small room was usually only running a couple of mics – so this meant often I had to mix in there myself which

although it was cheaper with me only needing to pay staff rates to have someone replace me on the bar rather than engineer rates, it still had me stuck in the room when I preferred to be on the move... bit of a first world problem that.

One of the main problems though was making it work financially when it was the *only* room operating. As more and more shows went on in there lots of bands started wanting to play that room instead of the main room, but the problem was it had a separate entrance and often people wouldn't even venture into the main bar area, so making money was problematic. When it worked as a room complementing the main room it worked, but not on its own.

Even though we had some amazing band shows happen in there, the *Race Banyon EP release* was hands down one of my favourite gigs full stop. Eddie hadn't planned on doing a proper release party for his EP, but being that it was my favourite release in quite some time I demanded that he play a show to celebrate. He'd only really done a handful of support shows and he was still a nervous performer at this stage so was worried about getting enough people in the main room.

We put the show in the small room and it was crammed. I was jammed at one side of the room unable to move. After the show the walls were covered in sweat and I was dripped on a few times from the ceiling. It was the first time I'd really seen Eddie noticeably enjoy a performance and from then on his live performance was significantly more confident.

It's been amazing watching the growth of this live performer over the term of the venue which was why having Eddie do a headline show just before the venue's closure was important. Seeing him go from headlining a show that was free entry in the small room to selling out the main room with a cover charge and no other advertised acts was so heart-warming and important to the soul of the venue.

The final use of the room was when Brett (Puppies' famous doorman) wanted to try out an idea for running a pop-up barbershop. This led to some pretty ridiculous nights where people would come in for a show and get their haircut as well. I loved the idea that people would have that story and talk about the time they had their hair cut at the barber at *Puppies* and people wouldn't believe them. I had my hair cut a couple of times there too, it was pretty convenient.

I loved having the two spaces operating at the same time, I think doing it over again if I had a similar space I'd work out a way of doing a micro bar in there... we worked out a sweet way of how to do it at the time, but it required *some* effort and I was too lazy especially in the knowledge the bar only had 7-8 months left at that point.

## DJ BLINK

With any project you take on, it's important to find it really enjoyable, and for me personally, I need there to be an artistic release.

When we were open all these late nights with a live act playing at 1am and DJs playing before and after, often at some point the party would die – because we had a lack of chairs and sucked as a space to hang out and drink, when people started tiring from dancing, they would just leave. Around 2am there would often be only a dozen or so people left floating around and I'd feel really bad for the DJ - so I'd knock them off. I didn't want to close until 3am though because I felt if word got out that we weren't opening our advertised hours, people would stop coming late at night. This led me to having to do all these really difficult DJ sets – playing to a dead room.

When I first opened the bar, one of my plans was to within the two year time frame, to get really good at playing drums. I owned all these drum-kits I'd bought for Camp over the years but never had somewhere I could play them - I figured I'd jam all the time on the house kit. I didn't. Instead, I ended up DJing all the time, something I never anticipated, but being a jerk and testing people's patience, I happened to get pretty handy at DJing.

The “Blink at 2am” started becoming a regular “thing” unfortunately for my long suffering staff. A small group of locals would start coming in regularly knowing that odds are I would be doing something ridiculous, otherwise I'd just play to whatever randoms dropped in.

Each night I DJ'd, I'd choose a different theme, sometimes I'd send staff home and just run the whole bar by myself moving the DJ mixer to the bar and serving drinks at the same time, or even more annoyingly, on ultra dead nights, I'd just loop a track whenever someone ordered a drink and run to the bar, get drink, then go back to DJing.

Some nights I was more annoying than others and ridiculously self-indulgent. Some of my favourite were:

Playing *Naked and the Famous* 'Young Blood' for an hour; stretching, sampling and looping and fucking with it. Around the twenty minute mark a group of people who had been sitting listening for ages, got up and started going crazy, but after another ten minutes...stopped when it got annoying again.

Playing as many songs as possible in one hour. I was trying to play over 100 songs in an hour, pretty sure I did.

A *bakers dozen*. Something me and *Disasteradio* always talked about were doing “bakers dozens” and playing the same song 13 times in a row. We introduced *Regurgitator* to the concept when on tour with them in Australia in 2011 – we played a *Michael McDonald* song 13 times while driving on the West Coast –

*Regurgitator* then did a cover of it that night in Perth. At *Puppies*, one night, I played *Suren Unkas*' 'Early' thirteen times in a row, remixing it differently every time. Watching an audience (even a small one) deal with this is amazing.

*Coldplay* only for one hour. I have a serious soft spot for *Coldplay* but am always too scared to play their tracks when DJing – a cathartic way of overcoming that fear was playing nothing but them for an hour.

*Last songs only.* Playing an hour of epic ballads. Adele x Whitney Houston, etc

*Lorde.* When 'Royals' went number 1 on the US alternative charts I paid tribute by trying to turn it into a minimal techno track and played it several times trying to rework it into a totally new song. One of those recordings is online<sup>5</sup>. This was SO annoying at the time, some sweet moments though, and I was having a good time, at least.

*Anti-requests.* I'd have a real beef with people requesting songs, to the point that I'd spent one night trying to casually find out peoples most hated songs/bands, then when I got onto DJ, I trolled those who stuck around by playing those songs.

I'd have so much fun on these nights that very often, if I was just sitting at home during the week and bored I'd just come in and open up the bar by myself. On nights when it was never advertised we were open I'd set up EPIC dance parties, fill the room with smoke, lasers and move the DJ booth to the middle of the room. I'd then just start DJing hard-out and grin ear to ear whenever people would walk in hearing music from outside to be greeted by this most bizzare sight of a smoky, laser filled basement at 1am on a Monday evening. I did this all-the-time. I'd never tell anyone, just wait and see what happened and have these real personal dance parties with people – maybe just two or three would come in and we'd go nuts for an hour.

One of my favourite ever nights at the bar was one time when I came in on a random night like usual and started DJing, I was absolutely lost in what I was doing in the middle of this remix and had been at bar for almost two hours with nobody coming in. I was dancing and going crazy behind the mixer when I looked up and noticed a group of seven or so kids all dancing in front of me. I'd had no idea how long they had been there for and we proceeded to have a sweet dance party for an hour or so – soon I was knackered as I'd been at the bar for a while so just stopped and sat down. They all sat down also and we had this strange philosophical discussion for another hour or so. An experience that should have been bizzare, but at *Puppies*, felt perfectly normal.

In Sept/Oct 2013 I did a little DJ tour of New Zealand performing remixes I'd been working on, a concept of playing songs that people love, but remixing them in with songs you would not expect – and trolling local artists in each city – some of my favourite remixes were in Christchurch: *Yvnalesca vs Cher*, Auckland:

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<sup>5</sup> Go to [Soundcloud.com](https://soundcloud.com) and search out "Jesus HTML Christ"



*Career Girls vs Nickleback*, Dunedin: *The Clean vs Scribe* and *The Futurians vs 30 Seconds to Mars* – though there were almost 100 remixes with local acts I was messing around with in total. I recorded a few of these sets, and when I have time (yeah, right) plan to put some of these up on the aforementioned “Jesus HTML Christ” page.

The months leading up to this tour, I’d go into the bar and do these random DJ sets 2-3 times a week, but stopped almost immediately after the DJ tours, as working on *Squarewave Festival* and *CALH* took up most of my spare time.

This was what having your own bar was to me, a chance to have fun. Years ago I would have been worried about “diluting” my brand, alienating people through creating so much awkwardness, but after being concerned about that crap for years, I put having fun ahead of worrying that people might not like what I was doing. Self indulgent and ridiculous – like any good business should be. Even though there were numerous amazing performances at the bar, great bands and incredible parties – my random DJ sets are my fondest memories.

## FINANCIALS

I announced publicly the closing of Puppies nine months before I did so. Though I’ve been telling people in person for ages I was planning on closing, I wanted to notify my landlord I was definitely not continuing the lease before making it public. Still, when word got about me closing, I was this was immediately met with these “pity eyes” and a responses like “aw well, you gave it your best shot” or “well, it takes quite a while to make a business work”.

People barely ever considered for a moment it was on my terms. How many struggling businesses announce so far ahead of time they are ending? *Puppies* did well from the first week of opening – it’s the first time in years I’ve had a regular income and one of the reasons I set up the bar was I was sick of all the debt I had accumulated and I wanted to pay it off.

I’d owed the IRD a silly amount of overtue tax for years due to my poor book-keeping and not having an accountant until only a few years ago. I also still owed my parents some money from debt I’d never 100% cleared from the loan they gave me after the financial failure of the first Camp in 2007. I knew I had to knuckle down and pay everyone back and the plan was to be debt free by the time I closed the bar. I managed to clear it up ahead of timing, getting debt free by March 2014.

I had to pay \$275 a week to the IRD for two years and for a good portion of that time also an additional \$100 a week to my parents. On top of that my rent and living expenses and most weeks I needed \$600 *just* to get by. As well as the bar covering its costs and me never being late with rent or bills and employing

several staff, well, it paid me enough so I could eat and get debt free – and have a great time doing so.

Now with my debts clear, it's nice actually earning an income, and I'm scared about closing the bar because I've gotten used that income but I've never made decisions based upon money. I look at where I'm at now as a fresh start. To me, *Puppies* was the end of an era, tidying up loose ends from the 10+ years of shows beforehand. Trying out some ideas, having fun and clearing debt so I can start fresh with some interesting new projects.

To give you an idea of the costs involved and what it made, I'll lay out some very rough figures below. All figures (keeping things simple) include GST.

The rent was \$2683 a month, \$670 a week.

Ignoring set-up or yearly costs involved with licensing, the weekly overheads of rent, power, internet, rubbish disposal, glass recycling, rental of two eftpos machines, insurance and a glasswasher came to almost more or less \$1000 per week.

I priced everything very cheap. So I wouldn't try to sell any one type of booze over anything else I priced items on their *per ml* price and rounded up or down based on what I sold my cheapest beer for.

I.e. The cheapest beers at a cost of \$1.67 for 330ml, I would sell at \$6, which is a profit of \$4.33 over 330ml, or \$1.30 per 100ml. If I then bought a craft beer at \$6.50 for 500ml I would simply multiply the 500 by 1.3 so the ratio was the same and then add onto the cost price, leading to selling it for \$13, so even though the craft beer was only a 200% markup and the cheap beer was a 375% markup I was still making the same profit per ml sold. This can make booking keeping tricky because working out your "cost of sales" is not straightforward, but worked for me.

When we first opened the bar I sold my cheapest beer for \$4 and then usually another at \$5. The aim of this was to try to get people to come to the bar early and stop preloading, however, I didn't seem to notice this really having the desired effect. I wanted to prove that you could run a successful model while offering cheap prices but what I'd failed to take into account was all the extra work that selling that booze would create. The extra time shopping, storing, chilling, moving into display fridges, collecting empties and then dumping. Selling so many beer bottles was really frustrating to the point that I'd actually start getting annoyed after a really successful night because of the daunting shop the next day (the ultimate first world problem).

The main reason I put my prices up eventually was so I could do less work.

Had I known then what I know now, I would have paid to get beer lines (taps) installed. I didn't imagine the bar was going to be so successful and knowing it was short term I didn't think the investment was worth it, but looking back, saving even just two hours of shopping and shuffling stock around per week over the two years was around 200 hours of lost productivity, not to mention the

potential higher returns and the benefits for the environment.

I built a Kegerator<sup>6</sup> when I first opened the bar. I installed two pull taps (purchased from a brewing supplies store) and drilled into an upright fridge, along with the appropriate tubing and gas tanks. This was able to house two “corny kegs” which are mini kegs of beer and hold 19 litres ea. This worked really well when we had it functioning. For quite a while at the bar we were selling a local brew, an alcoholic, spiced ginger beer, *Dana Scully* (ginger and hot), made by *Cryptobrewology* (the name of a couple of the bar staff who were interested in brewing), this got so massively popular around town but keeping up with demand was difficult. By the time we were ending serving it, on many nights it would be our second most popular beer, second only after the \$4 cheap beer. *Dana Scully* got almost “cult” status around town and was also being served at several house parties. It was amazing and a definite loss when it stopped getting made.

I wish I'd really made more effort to sort out a better beer distribution system, the only downside to tap beer is more broken glass. Gees, they don't tell you this when you open a bar, but holy crap... you break A LOT of glasses. I got so sick of buying glasses but we'd lose on average a couple every single night – if a particularly debauchorous night we'd lose half a dozen.

Buying those hard out fancy unbreakable glass-looking, special plastic glasses might be a pretty hefty investment to start with, but if doing this all again, I'd definitely consider them.

Back to costings again, when I was only open around ten hours a week for the final three months, my additional costs for security, cleaning, bar staff and myself were an additional \$950 per week. Bringing my weekly costs to just under \$2000 a week to open for ten hours.

On average my cost of sales (the cost of the booze sold as a percentage of what it sold for) overall was around 35% meaning I would need to bring in \$3000 in sales to cover all costs- \$1000 in overheads and \$950 in wages and the \$1000 of stock costs.

This was pretty simple, but deciding to open this way – two days a week, it meant that I was taking a bit of a risk, if one of the shows on a weekend was a fail, it meant the other had to cover the loss.

My target for any weekend show was \$1500-2000. This was achieved easily most of the time. With normal bar prices, beers starting at \$8/9 – a nightly budget for a venue this size should be much greater – but I was trying to prove you could run a venue successfully selling booze at a fair price.

To reach my small budget over the bar with my cheap prices it would require around 70 people at a show, this wasn't too difficult with a reasonable amount of effort put into booking.

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<sup>6</sup> Search out “Kegerator” on *Google* for simple instructions on how to make one. They're incredibly simple to make. If I can make one, anyone can.

Curiously, I found that not only did spending habits of people change depending on the style of music, but there was this exponential growth that occurred and it was fascinating.

If you have a small attendance at a show, because of the difficulty of achieving “fun vibes”, the spend per head will be down, ie: if you have 25 people at a show they’ll often just not be in the mood for drinking – especially if *downer* bands are playing.

Say for example attendees each spend \$15 on the bar -- so you get a bar-take of \$375. Now if you have 50 people, it doesn’t just double, what happens is the vibe in the room gets better as well, people get looser so maybe you have an average spend of \$20 per head leading to \$1000 on the bar. Add another 25 people and you start to get a really nice buzz happening and suddenly the average spend is \$25 per head and around \$1875 on the bar but once you hit that number of people that is around 50% of your capacity, the per head spend starts coming down as people are less likely to visit the bar since there are more people in the room and they’ll be afraid of losing their spot. Depending on how long the set goes for and the type of band this could drop RAPIDLY leading to a doubling of the audience but only an increase of around 10-15% on the bar.

This is particularly apparent the more “chill” your headline act is. If it’s a folk act, you can write off selling a bunch of drinks during their performance. People not only feel too awkward ordering drinks during quiet performances, but people just stay rooted in place.

Just opening two nights a week and making sure I had shows where I’d get at least 70 people showing up meant that I could easily attain the budget covering all costs including paying myself and even putting some money away into the business. Opening more nights than this didn’t work so well.

I don’t really see myself as a “bar guy”. I didn’t open a bar because I wanted to be this uber-social cool dude, type person behind a bar pouring drinks. I’m the worst type of person to be behind a bar, I don’t even know the product. I’ve never had a single one of the beers we sell. People always ask me for recommendations; I tell them the orange juice.

So when the bar became a four-five night a week venture, I just wasn’t keen to be there, hence extra staff costs. Thursdays are those days where sometimes you have a good night and sometimes you have a shitter, but even the good nights aren’t that great. A good night we’ll take \$1200-1500 on the bar, a shitter \$150-250. The costs of me opening on a Thursday just in staff costs would be \$200+. If we do a lame bar-take like \$400 (all too common), it cost \$360 (includes rider) to do so (not counting slightly extra expenses on cleaning, rubbish disposal, power and wear and tear on equipment) and this doesn’t include the time buying and restocking the stock sold. The times we have good bar-takes get evened out by the times we have shitters, it just didn’t work out. The only reason I found to open those extra days were:

1) To keep a hold of good staff. If you can only offer staff 9 hours a week, obviously you don't get your pick as much as you do when you can offer 25-30+ and

2) To give younger, lower profile bands a chance at shows and building audience. After a while though I thought it would have just been a better idea just do two "band" shows on Fridays and Saturdays rather than do Wednesday and Thursday plus Friday and Saturday shows.

Had I created a space for drinking, opening those other nights might have worked better, but I decided I wanted solely a live music venue, so decided to focus on what worked best.

Opening such few hours and really honing what works best meant I looked forward to working. There were not many periods of just standing around doing nothing and you never really got bored. Shows were exciting and they made money.

It was a curious model. Including all wages (including myself) and overheads, It cost me \$200 each hour I was open but, it worked, and worked well.

#### MULTI STAGES

I wanted lots of shows at *Puppies* to be like a festival. As well as using my small room (*The Internet*) to host shows, I also threw in some crappy staging and set up a second stage in the main room to the right of the "main stage".

This stage had no backline on it and was only suitable for electronic acts but I used it all-the-time. I would use this and stage festival-style nights with non-stop music where an electronic act kicked off immediately after an act on the "main stage". This gave *Puppies* a real point of difference, setting us apart from any other venue. There might be other venues in NZ who would do multiple stage things on occasion, but we did it multiple times a month. Add to this when we'd do nights also using *The Internet* and we'd have a three stage party happening and *Puppies* was on its own.

When the second stage wasn't being utilised by acts we'd still leave it in place as it would make a great riser for people to stand on during packed shows and get a good viewpoint of the show.

## BOOKING

This was to be the major difference between *Puppies* and most other bars in the country. My idea is that venues need to be promoters as well as venues, they need to take their fate into their own hands and learn how to connect with audiences and be responsible for their own success. My plan was that I would book at least 2/3rds of the shows with bands I personally liked/believed in – so at least if the shows had crap turnouts, well, I'd be enjoying watching the bands – and I would make sure that there were still plenty of nights I gave bands I didn't know, a chance.

I think too many venues leave booking too much up to chance, just waiting to see what emails they get asking for dates and trying to fit things around. The only way I think to book successfully is to go out there and find shows, make shows happen – make sure you achieve a great balance with your bookings.

Different sorts of bands bring different types of audiences who buy different types of drinks and spend varying amounts of money. You need to identify what bands work and to make sure that these nights are used well.

The ideal “money making” bands are those who attract a “working” audience. I.e: 25-35 year olds. Those with discretionary income and who like to spend it.

Also, ideally a band who can play longer than an hour and who obviously will pull a good number of people along. Young “music fans” don't tend to drink much – an “indie” audience is one of the worst as far as bar sales go (I'm so proud of this) and also even headline indie acts will often only play thirty minute sets, so you lose a significant amount of sales.

People are smart. They know if a band is only going to play thirty minutes and they'll just buy one drink before the final band starts and nurse it till they finish, or drink, have a dance, then drink some water then leave.

When a band is playing who it seems are never going to finish, that is when the drink sales start coming in, BUT, if you're trying to make \$\$\$ over the bar, you don't want to have bands who are too engaging. This was perhaps the most curious observation for me running *Puppies*, which I should have imagined going in, but didn't even think about it.

If you've got an act on that everybody loves and doesn't want to miss a moment of, it screws your drink sales.

One of most eye opening nights for me was the first time *Liam Finn* played the bar. It was a sell-out show, but we only sold a dozen or so drinks during the almost 90 minutes he played. Of course, the 30 minutes before he took the stage we were absolutely overwhelmed and the bar-take was still great, and it's always a pleasure hosting that hairy man, but damn, his fans love him too much. People were just glued in place and didn't want to lose their spot. We had lots of similar shows to this, artists whom people loved and whom just didn't want to waste time buying drinks during their sets.

It's a trick finding that fine line between filling up the room so it feels great but not making it so it's impossible to get to the bar. The ideal kind of band for generating bar-sales? Somebody like *The Nudge*, this is not meant to seem offensive as they're a great live band, but you want a band who can attract not only that older age group with income, but one who will play a really decent long set and seem like they're never gonna finish (ie: have a "jammy" element), plus be a band who people can dance to and who get a party going. It pays if they're not too engaging, a jammy element really helps with this – if it's a band playing songs from albums everyone has, people don't want to miss a moment.

One of the reasons I really liked to be in control of booking shows was that I could plan things for certain times of the month. I always planned the guaranteed cash cow shows for the weekend before I needed to pay rent so I'd be sure of having no problems with it, I'd then plan a weekend of really dubious shows for the middle of the rent month when I was thinking least about making ends meet and could take the most risk.

I'd leave at least 1-2 weekend dates free for bands who I wasn't really familiar with or was suspect of their ability to draw a good crowd to take a gamble on, but would make sure I had at least 4 really good shows a month and I would try to keep the shows as varied as possible so I wasn't burning out the same audience.

It disappointed me how audiences lived up to their stereotypes – the only two times that significant damage happened was during scuzzy punk shows and we'd always end up with some (lame tagging) graffiti after hip hop shows. I like graffiti when it's funny and intelligent, but was always disappointed when somebody wrote something lame or there was some pointless tagging. I'd get embarrassed when I went to the toilet sometimes reading the shit people thought was funny when they were drunk. Gawd.

Though I chased many artists and asked them to play, I would try to limit the amount of times I was financially investing in shows, though often it was unavoidable. While I booked and chased down at least 60-70% of the weekend shows at the venue, I was probably the promoter and financially responsible for around 30-50%. I think the only way a music venue who doesn't also make money as a *drinking bar* can become sustainable and competitive is to be an in-house promoter.

I would where possible refrain from offering bands a guarantee but I would book flights and take care of organising the show and give them any money once costs were covered. I wouldn't take a "promoters cut" (what's new), as I saw it as being covered in my wages from working at the bar as booker.

Another way to simplify booking is to build relationships with other reliable promoters and brands. Putting aside dates on your calendar to work with these people to put on sweet shows. There is a distinct lack of promoters in New Zealand putting on underground shows, because well, there is no money in it, but the trick is just to find sweet dudes putting on rad events. I had relationships with several local promoters who I could call onto throw regular parties.

A good band booker is often the most overlooked part of any music venue. When struggling, a bar owner may take it upon themselves to do, or hire someone on a very part time basis – think again, this is THE most important part of your business.

A good booker will be one who has existing relationships with bands, whom people like, who knows how to respect bands, knows what it's like to be in a band/ touring, follows the music scene, goes out to shows all-the-time and understands how to run a show.

When I talk to a venue booker I want them to understand the bands I'm touring and know what we need. When booking a tour I don't have all the time in the world to maintain multiple back and forths with venues discussing what we need – I prided myself on this at *Puppies*. I'd book a band and nine times out of ten, they'd show up with no further communication and I'd have everything waiting for them.

It was amazing watching how the entire music scene in Auckland for the past 15 years has just followed wherever Matthew Crawley was booking for. Starting at *Paradise Bar* then *Edens*, *Schooner Tavern*, *Whammy*, *Cassette Nine* and now *Golden Dawn*. He has been responsible for kicking off and taking those bars to the next level – wherever he was booking for was the venue *du jour*.

His understanding of how to run shows and his affable nature made him an invaluable part of any venue. He was my booking hero.

## SAME BAND, MULTIPLE NIGHTS

One of my goals with *Puppies*, was to take a venue considered “for small profile bands” and make it the venue that many of the best bands around played at. The theory was simple. For a band who could probably get 3-400 people along to a large venue, but at quite an expense of promotion and production, could do a show at *Puppies* with zero overheads and though playing to a max of 300 over two nights, they'd save money by not needing to do any promotion, so would make almost the same amount of money as playing one show to 350/400. Also, they'd be playing shows which were more fun – to more intimate audiences, less stress – not having to worry about filling a large room and sounded better – there are always bad sounding spaces in large rooms and the band gets to improve live by playing more shows.

The benefits to the bar were obvious. It cut down my booking work by 50% having one band play two shows, it meant our work was more enjoyable as we got to see some amazing bands and it meant the bar got taken seriously as a venue for established acts. We did quite a few of these “weekend long” shows including ones with *The Phoenix Foundation*, *Beastwars*, *Snapper*, *So So Modern*, *Kirin J Callinan*, *Disasteradio*, *Liam Finn*, *Grayson Gilmour* and when the bar closed, this awesome three weekend run of *The Bats*, *Lawrence Arabia* and *Tiny Ruins* which saw me only having to sort three headline acts to play seven nights at the bar in a row, and amazing shows as well!



For out of town bands it's a nice change of pace, they get to spend a full day in the city exploring and are well relaxed before the second nights show. With many acts it also gives them the chance to experiment with playing different types of sets, for example *So So Modern* took the opportunity to recreate their *Szo Szo Mzodsern* performance from *CALH2013* where they had composed a single 45 minute track and *Lawrence Arabia* used three nights at the bar to perform his three released albums, one each night.

## RESIDENCIES

I love the idea of residencies. A solid residency is a dream for a bar. A lot of the work in running a successful venue is in booking acts. If you can just book one act and have them play every single week, it not only saves you the time and effort booking one night every week but you get a chance to develop a night that could be hugely beneficial for the bar. Finding an act who can do a residency is trickier than it seems. To find an act that can play every single week for months and months without boring people or playing the same songs over and over is rare. The most common types of bands to have do this are blues jam bands or jazz bands and these nights work well at sit down type events – however, I didn't want anything of that sort – it would have bored me to death. My initial idea was to put together a rad karaoke/covers band. A band that would learn a huge set of decent covers but also give punters the opportunity to sing as well, the idea was that people could make requests online and the band would learn and play that song the following week.

I put together a band with the intention of doing this, based around Matt Brennan (who runs an alternative karaoke night called “Karaoke Dick”) and some local musicians. I think they got in around two practises all up. I had been conceptualising this idea for quite a while and how I would promote and run it, but I didn't have the guts in the end. Just wasn't that confident enough to guarantee the band enough of a regular income to make it worth it for everyone. I was working with people who write amazing original music and though they were all intrigued with the idea of becoming a kick ass covers band, at the end of the day, they were passionate about their own stuff and playing covers wasn't that appealing.

I went back to the drawing board after that failure, still keen to make something work. I decided rather than trying to create a band from scratch as it could be a lot for work for a similar outcome, to try and create an environment that worked with a local originals act. My first thought in this area was to develop something with *West Coast Bullies*. An incredibly under-rated band, those guys are doing something ridiculously unique and it can vary every time you see them, the problem was that Reece is a very in demand drummer and usually playing shows around town most nights and I was unsure they could be accessible enough that people who would just casually drop in would “get”.

I had become quite jaded about the idea of a residency as I was very reluctant

to go the obvious improv jazz route and this was seeming more and more like the answer. Then one night just when I was giving up hope, this “band” #3**ch**Δin\$-@-†Δ•nga played a lowly attended show at Puppies. Though there set was only around 45 minutes and there were only twenty or so people there, I knew this was the band. I’ve always found it difficult describing this band to people. There is definitely an improvisational element to their sets and there are often jazz trained musicians involved, but it’s straight r’n’b and posi-vibes hip hop. Sounding like a bunch of drunk dudes covering 2Pacs’ ‘Changes’ for hours, #3**chain**\$ were unlike anything I’d witnessed before.

They were ridiculous really – a trainwreck, but at the same time, brilliant and some moments – incendiary. For the casual observer “tourist”, who would just pop in and watch them for 20 minutes or so, they’d seem pompous and annoying – but to watch #3**chain**\$ you had to watch the whole show, and several times. It’s like a cult film where the more you watch the better it gets, you start to learn all the lyrics and hooks, everyone starts singing along and you recognise the various guests each night (one night there were three different saxophone players) – waiting around for the final track ‘Holding Hands with Ma Homies’. Some sets you might be waiting three hours for that track to come around.

#3**chains** played every Wednesday at *Puppies* for around 3 months plus the occasional special one-off night afterwards. Though the nights weren’t a *huge* success financially, they covered themselves and offered all my staff an extra night’s work. Some nights would do better than others and a handy feature about them is they’d get me some cashflow before the weekend.

The best thing about the shows though is that they fitted the aesthetic of the bar – they were the perfect band to play a residency in a dive bar adorned with tacky gold wallpaper and airbrushed art. I saw the #3**chains** shows as equal parts performance art and music and enjoyed them thoroughly when I hung around.

Great dudes to deal with and the nights were totally unique to Puppies.

## KARAOKE DICK

A bloke in Wellington, Matt Brennan had this pretty genius idea many years ago, alternative Karaoke. He created this brand *Karaoke Dick* and took Karaoke another level. Not only having a massive database of your classic Karaoke tracks and having a ton of tracks nobody else has, punk, metal, hip hop, indie etc, but he’ll make Karaoke videos for tracks as soon as they’re out. Eg, the week ‘Get Lucky’ by *Daft Punk* is out we’ve got it on Karaoke at *Puppies* – one of my favourite moments at the bar was the night of the release of ‘New Slaves’ by *Kanye West* and Matt rushed to get a video made so we’d have at the bar that very night. Me and Matt owned that track in *The Internet* that evening. He’d also get local recordings (sans vocals) from local bands and make Karaoke tracks for local artists. *Disasteradio*’s ‘Gravy Rainbow’ was a favourite at the bar.

We started *Karaoke Dick* as weekly parties in *The Internet* before moving it to the main room. I love karaoke. There is no such thing as bad karaoke and we had

some amazing parties at the bar. The nights were often problematic as much of Matt's gear is held together by gaffer tape and goodwill, so sometimes we'd be scrambling around for various fixes and starting late killed momentum.

The problem with Karaoke is its very success is its downfall. The more people you get at an event, the more people you have requesting songs and the longer the wait is for people to get a chance – people get frustrated and leave before their song comes up.

Achieving critical mass with Karaoke is even more difficult as people walking in on some cringy karaoke just turn around and walk right back out again, but when you've got enough people to make it fun<sup>7</sup>, well, then, it gets awesome.

## CONCLUSION

Puppies was a success. Though I got a few things wrong that come with running a bar for the first time and having no understanding of the alcohol industry, I developed a pretty easily workable model where I could open only nine hours a week and specifically as a live music venue only and run a profitable, sustainable business with a huge earning potential.

Increasing opening hours with solid ideas or working out ways of bringing in a casual drinking audience for late at night or after-work drinks can only build on the financial success of this model.

You don't *need* to charge bands to hire the venue, you *can* treat the public with respect and let them know how shows are running and run them to that format without any difficulty. You *can* provide bands with a service to make their shows cheaper and easier. You *can* take a venue associated with small profile acts and present large profile acts there. You *can* make drinks affordable. You *can* build a solid base for the future by avoiding doing cheap shows, staunchly monitoring guest lists and never reducing door-charge during an evening. People *will* turn up on time if you prove that you can run shows on time and keep to your word, and you can use that ability to run multiple shows in an evening, maximising the earning potential on any given evening.

Maybe, I might do it all again sometime.

<sup>7</sup> Search out "Karaoke Dick Puppies Blink" on *Youtube* to see a night when I trolled Karl Stevens by singing a *Supergroove* song one night after a show with his new band *Drab Doo-Riffs*. I'm such a jerk, but got the surprise of my life when he jumped up and started singing with me.



## **A LOW HUM PUBLISHING**

- ALH001 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 1
- ALH002 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 2
- ALH003 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 3
- ALH004 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 4
- ALH005 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 5
- ALH006 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 6
- ALH007 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 7
- ALH008 A LOW HUM, Series 1, Issue 8 (unreleased)
- ALH009 Hello Mum
- ALH010 A LOW HUM, Series 2, Issue 8
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- ALH032 Best of A Low Hum Zine (Craftwerk Edition)
- ALH033 Camp A Low Hum 2008 Guide Book
- ALH034 Camp A Low Hum 2009 Guide Book
- ALH035 Camp A Low Hum 2010 Guide Book
- ALH036 Camp A Low Hum 2011 Guide Book
- ALH037 The Process in which I plan, book and manage tours overseas (Draft Zine)
- ALH038 Camp A Low Hum 2012 Guide Book
- ALH039 D.I.Y Touring the World
- ALH040 Camp A Low Hum 2013 Guide Book
- ALH041 Square Wave Festival Poster Book
- ALH042 Camp A Low Hum 2014 Guide Book
- ALH043 The Problem with music in New Zealand and how to fix it & Why I started and ran Puppies
- ALH044 The End of Puppies

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ian Jorgensen — aka Blink — is the creator and facilitator of the long-running New Zealand underground music entity A Low Hum. In the past decade he has published 28 magazines, released 42 CDs, 3 DVDs, a plethora of digital, vinyl and cassette releases, toured over 60 bands around New Zealand and hosted eight editions of the annual, world-renowned music festival Camp A Low Hum.

In keeping with his strong D.I.Y. focus, Blink shared his knowledge and experiences of the NZ music scene in the 2006 publication of “Local Knowledge” and “DIY Touring the World” in 2011, now, he shares his insight behind another project, a live music venue, “Puppies” and his reasons for creating it.



*ALH043*

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