



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND  
YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: [Future use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston](#))

**Members:**

**MS A BRESNAN (The Chair)  
MR J HANSON (The Deputy Chair)  
MS M PORTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2012**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 6205 0199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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*Amended 9 August 2011*

## **The committee met at 9 am.**

**RAYMOND, DR OLIVER**, private capacity

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Dr Raymond. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. We are here today for a hearing of the inquiry by the education, training and youth affairs committee into the future use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston arts precinct. We had a hearing yesterday, we will have one today and later in February we will have another hearing when the government will appear. We have been letting everybody know that the committee commissioned two acoustics studies of the Fitters Workshop and they will, hopefully today or before too long, be on the committee website so that everybody can see those studies.

I want to make sure that you are aware of the privilege statement that is on the blue card on the table in front of you, so that you have read that and are aware of the implications of that. I draw your attention to the fact that the hearings are being broadcast on the website live, so that you are aware of that when you are giving evidence. Before we go to questions from the committee, I would like to invite you, Dr Raymond, to make an opening statement.

**Dr Raymond:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I speak to you with a great deal of experience over many years in music, specifically choral and vocal music, and in particular experience with Canberra choirs and in the Fitters Workshop in that connection.

I will speak to my submission to begin with. I referred at the beginning of it to the extent and quality of musical activity in Canberra. They are indeed very great, and not just in choral music but in all forms of music. That is because, I suppose, of two things: the great extent of amateur interest in and enthusiasm for music, and also because of the very significant professional presence in Canberra of musicians which enriches and enhances the quality of the experience for the great many amateurs that are involved in the scene.

I mentioned briefly that I had experience in the Fitters Workshop in the Canberra International Music Festivals of 2009, 2010 and 2011. That experience, both as a performer and as an audience member, confirmed in my own judgement the particular, very special acoustic qualities of the Fitters Workshop, about which by now you will have heard a great deal. I was struck by the tremendous response in the petition that was made, signed by some 1,600 people, I believe, who shared my judgement in this matter.

It seems very clear to me that the government is very fortunate in the legacy it has from Canberra's origins in the Fitters Workshop, presenting the government with a golden opportunity to really create a very special venue for music and for other art forms, but especially for music, because of the acoustic qualities of the Fitters Workshop. It would in fact be something of an artistic coup for an ACT government of vision and imagination that was willing to exploit to the full a very special opportunity which four years ago it did not know it had. But since that decision made in 2008 to put Megalo into the Fitters Workshop, this opportunity has now come to notice.

There is a very strong reason, I believe, for the government to rethink its initial decision and create a very special musical venue which has the potential to be the best of its kind in Australia and among the top such venues in the world, if the opinions of prominent Australian musicians, and indeed others as well, are to be given credit, which I think they are.

What I am suggesting is not the kind of policy dilemma which I observe the *Canberra Times* has tended to present in its publication of either accommodating the musicians or accommodating Megalo, with one winning and one losing. The opportunity here is to serve both parts of the artistic scene in Canberra better than is now envisaged. The musical venue would be a great boon for music in Canberra, and indeed for Canberra as a cultural capital, which I think has often been stated as an ambition for Canberra. There is also the opportunity to accommodate Megalo in a much better and more efficient way than is presently proposed by building for it, in the Kingston precinct, a new purpose-built building for Megalo. So it is a win-win. It is not a win on one hand and a loss on the other; it is a win and a win.

When the decision was made in 2008, I do not understand why it was made the way it was but I cannot believe that that decision was informed by a full consideration of what the alternatives were for the use of the Fitters Workshop. Such consideration would be very proper for a government in deciding what to do with a publicly owned building. Nor do I understand why the decision was made at some stage for the Kingston precinct to be just a visual arts precinct. Again, it would seem to me that the alternatives could not have been considered in making a true multi-arts precinct, including the visual and the performing arts. That way ahead would be a much more advantageous way to go because it would encourage and foster multi-arts activity involving the collaboration of organisations from a variety of art forms, both visual and performing.

There is a precedent of a kind in Melbourne called the Abbotsford Convent. I was looking at its website yesterday. I am not very familiar with it but I have heard of the Abbotsford Convent and, as I said, I had a look at the website. I suspect that is an example of the kind of multi-arts precinct which could, with much advantage, be established at Kingston. At all events, it is not clear why it was presupposed that the range of arts in the Kingston precinct should be just visual.

So there it is. My crucial points are that the government has two very special opportunities: to bring off a real artistic coup by creating a very special, verging on unique, musical venue and also to create a multi-arts precinct in Kingston.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Raymond. In your submission you said that there are other venues in Canberra that can accommodate music performances.

**Dr Raymond:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** What makes the Fitters Workshop, in your view, better than or different from some of those other venues?

**Dr Raymond:** It is the acoustic. You picked on the major point which has so often

been lost in all of the discussion and debate that has gone on about the Fitters Workshop ever since last year, when it was first raised by the petition. The crucial point is the very special acoustic. It is true that there are other musical venues in Canberra and, depending on how wide you make the net, there are quite a large number of them. But they each come with their advantages and disadvantages to do with the facilities they offer, the acoustics they have, the cost, their sizes and so on—a great many considerations. But the unique feature of the Fitters Workshop is the acoustic, which is unequalled, certainly in Canberra and, if someone like Peter Sculthorpe is to be believed, possibly in Australia. But certainly in Canberra, anyway. I think it is unfortunate that in the discussion and debate that has gone on, so often sight has been lost of the fact that the major point, and the whole reason why this arose, rests in the acoustic.

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that you have not seen the consultants' reports that we have had done but they will obviously be on the website. They both make the point about the acoustics and their being unique but also that the building would probably only be suitable for very specific performances. In terms of having used the venue, is that something you would agree with? I am just trying to get your views on that.

**Dr Raymond:** It would not be suitable for every kind of musical performance, no. No venue is or can be because the range of musical performances is extremely wide, ranging from very intimate, small chamber ensembles to the great, enormous symphony orchestras. So no one venue would be suitable for the full range. It cannot be. But the Fitters Workshop would be suitable—in fact, not just suitable but extremely advantageous—for quite a range of styles of music, including, for example, choral from the very smallest scale up to quite large choirs. It would perhaps not be suitable for the very largest, which might be just a bit much. It is similarly the case for instrumental music from, again, the very smallest scale up to middle-sized ensembles of instruments. It would be suitable for a wide range of styles ranging from classical to jazz to folk to world music and so forth. I do not think it would be suitable at all for loud rock music. I think that would be over the top. But there is a very wide range of musical styles and scales for which the Fitters Workshop would be excellent.

You can see the same sort of considerations applying to other venues with which it might potentially be compared, such as the Wigmore Hall in London, which is world renowned as an excellent venue, including acoustically, for small-scale musical performances, and probably performances of the same sort of range as would be suitable for the Fitters Workshop. So using the Fitters Workshop as a musical venue would make excellent sense.

**MR HANSON:** Dr Raymond, from what the committee has heard, there is a clearly a view that this is an exceptional acoustic space. I was talking to a lady at a palliative care function last night who had been to a concert there and she said it brought tears to her eyes. It seems to move people in an exceptional way. The question I have, though, is that, given that it may be usable for certain types of musical activity and not suitable for others, is there the demand in Canberra to make it a viable entity? There might be, say, three or four concerts a year where it is packed out and used. Knowing the musical scene in Canberra, what sort of demand do you envisage on a regular basis? A concern might be that, although it is a splendid musical place, it may not be used sufficiently. We have to make assessments about the merits of Megalo versus the

musical community. Demand and usage is an important factor. Have you got any views on that?

**Mr Raymond:** Yes. I guess that the answer to your question will depend very much on what ultimately is charged for the use of the venue. The cost of venue hire is a very large consideration amongst the several that go into any group's planning of a performance.

The very substantial submission which has been made to this committee by Helen Moore on behalf of a range of choirs or people representing choirs, including me, has gone into this. The submission points out that, subject to the consideration I just mentioned of cost, there is scope for very full use of the Fitters Workshop not just as a musical venue but, as we have always proposed, also as an exhibition space and a recording space. These different kinds of activities could complement each other in the times of day and times of the week at which the Fitters Workshop was used. Yes, there is potential for very full use of the Fitters Workshop as a musical and other kind of venue.

**MS PORTER:** With regard to the cost of hiring the venue, would you like to talk us through the costs of hiring other venues at the moment and what a group's experience is around that? Is it prohibitive in certain instances? What is the experience?

**Dr Raymond:** Again, in that submission on behalf of the group of choirs that I referred to a moment ago, I recall there is a listing in the comparison of presently available venues, including costs. The costs vary widely depending on which kind of venue you pick, ranging from the top end like Llewellyn Hall and the Canberra Girls Grammar school hall, which cost thousands to hire, down to, say, a small church, which might charge the odd couple of hundred. The range of costs is very wide.

So too is the range of characteristics of these venues, and so too is the range of budgets that apply for different performances. Big performances with big audiences have big budgets; smaller groups that have small audiences have small budgets. Where the Fitters Workshop would fit within that fairly wide range is going to be a very interesting question.

**MS PORTER:** You talked about the quality of performances and what experience people have when they attend. I have only attended one, but I recall that it is not a comfortable space as far as a person who is attending is concerned. It is a bit squashy trying to get out and in. You have to run electrical cords and things in there to put in the lighting and the heating if it is winter. There were no toilets available because the ones that were supposed to be open were not for some reason or other. That was probably just a glitch, but there were no toilets. Outside, where the refreshments were being served, it was very difficult to get to them. People were coming and going. It was all very squashy and uncomfortable.

Would people continue to be willing to pay to experience those kinds of inconveniences in order to be able to hear the quality of the music? Do you think if more permanent kinds of fixtures were put in place in order to accommodate those kinds of things that that would lower the quality of the acoustics?

**Dr Raymond:** For the Fitters Workshop to be usable as a venue, it would have to have some development. As you have said, at the moment, it is just a shell of A building with no utilities or anything. For it to be usable, some money would have to be spent on it to bring in utilities, power, water, toilets and sewerage and perhaps some extremely basic general sort of decorative improvement, I suppose. Perhaps that is not even necessary, given that people are very willing to come to the Fitters Workshop, as it is for the international music festival events.

But for use by organisations other than the international music festival there would have to be some improvements made with basic utilities. The international music festival had to bring all those in itself, and not every organisation can do that. So what that means in terms of cost recovery in the form of hire charges remains to be seen.

People coming to the international music festival in quite substantial numbers were clearly not deterred by the fairly primitive conditions they were experiencing when they got there, because the musical experience was overriding their consideration.

**MS PORTER:** The installation of the fittings that you talk about, do you think they would lower the quality of the sound?

**Dr Raymond:** No, I do not. I do not see that installation of any of those things would have any effect on it. The way the international music festival did it had no such impact. I would imagine that installing those utilities on a permanent basis could be done with equally low impact.

**MRS DUNNE:** Dr Raymond, you have had a lot of involvement in choirs and the Lieder Society, which is now Art Song, for how long in the ACT?

**Dr Raymond:** Really ever since I came here in 1969. Or perhaps 1970 I suppose would be the right starting date.

**MRS DUNNE:** In your experience, what can you say about the quality of the musical experience that you get from performances at the Fitters Workshop? Are there occasions when you see that it is better than others? From your experience, does it have a wide application for music or is it a niche musical experience?

**Dr Raymond:** The quality of experience that I have had whenever I have been in the Fitters Workshop, whichever side of the footlights I have been on, has been extremely high. That is because on the one hand the quality of the performers and on the other hand the quality of the space in which they are performing.

On the former point—the quality of the performers—that has been high either because the festival has brought in world renowned performers, such as the Song Company or Rajaton, and the performers have been from that very high quality musical scene that I referred to in my opening remarks which exists in Canberra, enhanced as it is by the very strong presence of high quality professional musicians that infuse their talent into the amateur scene.

On your second point about the range of usability of the Fitters Workshop, I see it as being at least as wide as any other musical venue that you can think of in Canberra or



perhaps anywhere. It is a space which, subject to that basic development that I already mentioned to meet needs, is potentially usable by a wide range of music ensembles from a wide range of musical styles. It is not a narrowly focused, single-purpose kind of venue at all.

**MRS DUNNE:** There was an assertion made yesterday that the acoustics of the fitters was, because of the reverberation, kind to amateur groups. That is a rough paraphrasing of a longer discourse. Do amateur groups perform in the Fitters Workshop? Were there amateur groups performing at the international music festival?

**Dr Raymond:** There were, yes. I was there as a member of the Oriana Chorale, which is an amateur group. Is the Fitters Workshop kind to amateur groups? It is kind to a wide range of musical groups, irrespective of whether they are amateur or professional. Amateur or professional really makes no difference. The amateur groups in Canberra and elsewhere for that matter very often approach professional standards in their performance. I am not too sure just where the remark comes from that you referred to that the Fitters Workshop is kind to amateur groups.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think it was that the characteristic of the acoustic was such that it helped mistakes to be glided over because of the reverberation.

**Dr Raymond:** I am not sure that that is the case. While the Fitters Workshop has this long reverberation time, its acoustic also has a wonderful clarity to it. That sounds contradictory, but it is not the case. I think others have made reference to this peculiar, perhaps unique, characteristic of the Fitters Workshop. As you sit there in the audience, you can hear everything that goes on. It is really not the case that anything is really hidden by a wash of sound. The reverberation certainly enhances the sound for these kinds of performances that I am talking about, but the clarity is still there in the acoustic. It provides a very intimate experience involving performer and audience. And there is not much hidden in that context.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Dr Raymond, for appearing before the committee. A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so you can check that for accuracy. Thank you very much for your time and your submission.

**Dr Raymond:** Thank you.

**Meeting adjourned from 9.30 to 9.51 am.**

**STEWART, MR COLIN, private capacity**

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Stewart, for appearing today before the education, training and youth affairs committee inquiring into the future use of the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. Thank you for getting here; I know it has been a bit of a rush for you. Just to let you know that we obviously held hearings yesterday. There will also be further hearings held later on 28 February and the government will appear on that date. We have been letting everybody know that the committee did commission two studies of the acoustics in the Fitters Workshop and these will be on the committee website today. So everyone will be able to see those.

Before we go to questions I will just go through a few housekeeping issues. I will draw your attention first off to the privilege statement that will be on the table in front of you. It should be on a blue card. Just so you are aware of that and the information that is in that. Yes? Thank you. I also want to let you know that the proceedings today are being broadcast on the web so you are aware of that when you are giving evidence. Before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. Thanks very much for having us. I am an architect, running an architectural practice in Canberra. As you may know, I have been involved in the Kingston foreshore area since the national competition back in 1997. My submission is mainly about—just in case you did not know some of the background to the precinct—my thoughts on it prior to anything to do with Megalo. I have not met Megalo. The first time I did was just now, so I apologise that I did not talk to them earlier.

I have not been consulted about any of these matters that are before the committee, but I just thought, on the basis of 15 years of work on the foreshore with the government through the Land Development Agency and the previous bodies before the LDA was formed, that I would run through my thinking in relation to it, which might be of interest to the committee.

My submission is before you. I have just got a number of reports here. I have extracted a few things. Apart from the Peter Freeman one they are mainly my studies that were commissioned by the government in relation to the cultural precinct. I just wanted to show you some background to that.

There was an early study done in 1993 about the two main important heritage buildings. That was just to cover the report by Peter Freeman in 1993. It talked about the bulk store, actually, called the Fitters Workshop—the bulk store in some cases. It said that large spaces should not be broken up into smaller spaces because it had nothing to do with music or anything else. It was commenting on the Powerhouse and the Fitters Workshop and said that large spaces should be retained. I think it says in here that petitioning or division of major spaces is not seen as appropriate. That was our first introduction to the precinct.

This is our competition winning cover on our stage 2 submission. There you can see at the top that that is looking down. The buildings were shown quite small because everyone was worried about anything over one storey at that stage. This area here you can see was identified as a key thing in the whole project as a special precinct. We

just called it the heritage precinct because we did not know what was going to go there. But it is a very big area. It is about three hectares, and it extends right down to what is now Eastlake Parade and all the parking area.

We actually saw the redevelopment of the Bus Depot markets, but the rest of it was a major cultural precinct. From 1997 onwards that was always kept out of the economic equation for the foreshore. So that land was not resold. It was to be retained and developed, as I understood it, as a grand cultural precinct with many, many arts groups and supporting private sector bodies who would pay rent to subsidise the arts groups. I have written many papers on this to the LDA. I do not know its status at this stage—that idea.

That again shows the original winning entry. You will see there is very little change from what it is today. Those yellow buildings were the new markets and arts development right along the northern side where the car park is. We tried to show as much green space of course, as you always do, but that is now a parking lot, which is important.

This is a 1997 drawing that we did that won the competition. That showed what we call the heritage precinct. It was not just two buildings. It was actually what I thought was a good idea not for the next five years but for the next 100 years—to develop a world-class establishment that would be self-funding and whatever.

This is another study in 2006, a report to the LDA on the refurbishment of the Fitters Workshop. We were the architects for the refurbishment. Millions of dollars, I think, were spent on a new roof and everything. That bit at the back, on the south side—the LDA were interested in expanding the space in some way. That is just an idea, an artist's impression. But to keep the main space free, there was a site the same size, the same footprint, as the Fitters Workshop at the back to allow additional space and all the services to support the main space. At that stage we had no idea who would go there or whatever.

A further report undertaken by—

**MRS DUNNE:** Vanessa Weedon and you.

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, Vanessa Weedon and me. These were negotiations with the Heritage Council. I became a member of the Heritage Council some time after this, but I was not at that stage. It was not directly to do with the Fitters Workshop but with the whole heritage precinct and establishing visual links to the lake. It is a bit off the track, but I just want to build a picture for you of what I understood the precinct to be.

All the drawings in there show this huge precinct. North is not upwards; north is to the side. But you can see at the right hand side the Fitters Workshop and the Powerhouse and all around it a whole bunch of industrial-type buildings which were low rise because we had to maintain a view from all the surrounding roads to the dominant Powerhouse building which was 20 metres high. The other buildings were about 10 metres high, much lower than the rest of the development in the foreshore.

It was of much less value of land because of these height restrictions than the site, say,

where the markets are and other sites there that can go up to six storeys. Theoretically, it is half as valuable. I always saw this as an industrial-type place with businesses wanting to be associated with the arts and culture paying rent to support the 20 or 25 per cent arts groups that wanted to be there—a self-funding thing that would actually generate income in the long term. It also included the Bus Depot markets activity. There was at least, in addition to the existing buildings, 20,000 square metres of gross floor area on the site, plus the 500 car parking spaces. So it was a major idea.

These were the drawings that were agreed with the LDA and the Heritage Council about cutting off buildings to make sure there was a vista and pathway from the lake to that Powerhouse building. The other sites could be built up. There are also vistas from the road on the island and the bridge to the Fitters Workshop and whatever and you can see at the back of the Fitters Workshop there is a site for that additional development.

This was another report that again showed the Fitters Workshop as site 15. It has always been known as site 15 for the last 15 years, as I understood it. It is there on the LDA's plan. Those sketches were the basis of that adopted plan. We show at the top there all that orange was actually the cultural precinct around the Powerhouse. Those buildings all run parallel to the original railway line and the Fitters Workshop rather than the rest of the scheme, which was mixed use development. They were just features of the whole cultural precinct area that identified the 20,000 square metres.

That is all I have in the presentation. On that basis I always imagined—rightly or wrongly—that the Fitters Workshop would be a multi-use space for markets or anyone. It is now claimed it has good musical attributes, which is interesting but adds to the property idea that maybe it is valuable as a shared space. I do not know anything about the funding or the design of what is proposed, actually. I have not looked at it in detail. Funding may be a difficulty, to add an annexe, but if funding was available I think it would be wonderful if it was kept as a space for everybody rather than just one group. As I say, I have got no idea of the funding, the restraints or the special needs of Megalo. I am sorry if I am intruding on their ambitions or expectations, but I am just explaining the background as I saw it as the original sort of originator of the design of the foreshore.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That has been extremely interesting. Mr Stewart, you said it was always your understanding that it would be a multi-use venue or facility. Is that in terms of any discussions or plans that were looked at by the LDA in those discussions you had with them? Was that something which was discussed at that time?

**Mr Stewart:** We did not know who was going to be in it. It was a long while before we even knew who was going to go into the Powerhouse. It was always thought of as a huge precinct with amazing opportunities for industrial-type buildings for entrepreneurial uses, but owned by the government and through a board of the different community groups that would be there, plus others. It was a self-funded place. That is what I always thought. I still think it is a good idea. It was presented for many, many years that way. Every time the LDA wanted to sell blocks of land in that site I would always say, "No, leave it till later." I was just trying to keep it open so that at some stage clever people might see the opportunity to build a unique cultural

hotspot.

**THE CHAIR:** As being that sort of cultural precinct, was it something that was viewed as having a number of different arts in that site and not just a particular—

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, a number of different arts and the Bus Depot markets.

**THE CHAIR:** Again, was that something that was discussed at the time? Can you recall that at all?

**Mr Stewart:** It was discussed for the last 15 years, as far as I know.

**THE CHAIR:** Many years, yes.

**MR HANSON:** It seems to have narrowed though, doesn't it, down to visual arts only? When did that occur? Were you part of that process?

**Mr Stewart:** No, I have never been consulted by Megalo or anyone associated with what is proposed now, that I can recall.-

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** Specifically, in terms of the Fitters Workshop, in the report that you put up there, it said that partitions would be inappropriate.

**Mr Stewart:** That was right back before even the competition, yes.

**MR HANSON:** And why was that view formed? Because of the usage of the building, or potential usage, or heritage?

**Mr Stewart:** I think it was just a heritage point of view. They were grand spaces, and they did not want to cut it up with apartments or something that would break up the space. The current proposals might of course fit within that. I have not seen the detail, but it was just a general comment about great spaces should be not cut up and you lose that opportunity for flexible use, I guess, or visually seeing the whole space.

**MR HANSON:** The ability to actually walk in and admire the inside of the building?

**Mr Stewart:** That is right.

**MR HANSON:** I guess that sort of space is pretty unique in Canberra in that regard.

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. They did actually talk, in other documents, about mezzanines and other things like that but not sort of totally filling in the space with a first floor and that sort of thing.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** You did not think that the addition of the other buildings that you had there on the screen, which adjoin and actually seem to be attached to the actual

building, would detract from the actual value of the building itself?

**Mr Stewart:** No, not at all.

**MS PORTER:** You were not concerned about that?

**Mr Stewart:** No. We were concerned about adding space next door so that you could have toilets and plant rooms and all the other servicing facilities to service the building, whatever went there. In fact, a lot of money was spent demolishing an addition, an earlier addition. You can see it on the end of the back wall. It cost a lot of money to get rid of quite a good building, on the northern end, which blocked Printers Way from connecting down and running around the cultural precinct. And I encouraged that building to be removed. It was not of any great heritage value. It was not of any heritage value but it was a big space. It stopped the road from being able to go around this cultural precinct, the whole thing. And I always thought it was important to protect it as an entity that would be valuable to the entire community.

**THE CHAIR:** Where was that particular building located, that one you just said was—

**Mr Stewart:** It was where we have shown an addition sort of parallel with it.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, because it had the parallel—

**Mr Stewart:** It was out at right angles. It actually came out a long way and intruded. It stopped Printers Way from cutting through and connecting to the road that goes to the bridge down to the island.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Sorry, Ms Porter.

**MS PORTER:** No, it is fine. I was finished.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** A couple of issues, if I could, Mr Stewart. Thank you for your contribution. In a sense, it could be said that you own the IP for the Kingston foreshore, as the winner of the competition for the redesign of Kingston foreshore. And you have given some sort of exposition here. In the design that was the winning design, how much emphasis was put on this cultural precinct? Over the years of your discussion, your input and your surveys to the point that we are at now, how much has that idea of the cultural precinct changed?

**Mr Stewart:** In my mind, it has not changed a lot. It has always been just sitting there. The main aim, I think, of the government was to release land and get the place developed and repay the cost of the infrastructure and everything else, but it was the only site that had something special, in a sense, for the community, apart from cafes and whatever. There are no public-type buildings in the foreshore, or identified sites that I know of.

I always felt it was not my job to try to formulate how you would do this. I just felt

the government has the wisdom and there would be a body who would see this opportunity. I kept writing, and sending to my superiors in the LDA, about this grand precinct which would be self-funding. And I even wrote, not knowing much about these things, and suggested how a board would be made up and operated and how you need to have some clever businesspeople on it as well as the people from the Powerhouse and any other groups and markets, any other groups that are identified to be there, and they would start building these buildings. I am a bit of an idealist and I just thought it was such a great idea that it would be taken up. But it is just sitting there as an idea and I just wanted to make you aware of it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I also ask: you would see the development of the Glassworks and the Powerhouse and the installation which pays homage to the old stack that was there as a first important step?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes, of course. Yes, I think to get any use in the Powerhouse is a very challenging proposition, frankly, because it was such a complex building. But I just thought we had told the community for years and years. I used to go out in front of community groups and tell them about features of the foreshore. There was a harbour and there was a cultural precinct. And I thought it would be more than one or two groups that would be interested in what I talked about—50 groups and all sorts of businesses who were interested in reaching business and arts, especially hands-on arts, not just art galleries but people, to make things at the foreshore. I just always thought that was what it would be, and that was what we showed people on this three-hectare zone.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned too that you were advised that a board would manage it. Would that be a board that would manage the whole precinct and work out—

**Mr Stewart:** The whole site, yes. But I had assumed it was not going to be sold, and therefore someone would—I am just an architect—set up a theme for this incredibly valuable site. You do not want to put a few sheds on it; you want to put as much activity as you can. And that would just happen, I suppose. But it needs to be tested, I guess.

**THE CHAIR:** And you mentioned that it would be almost like a public-private partnership, as such, that there would be some private investment in the site, as well as from the government?

**Mr Stewart:** Somehow. The board, whoever is running it, would raise money because they have got the land and all they need is some industrial-type buildings, which are much cheaper than other buildings, and up it would go. So I just assumed that is what would happen. The parking, because of the slope on the side, would be cut out and you would have this heritage listing. Ramp it along next to the railway line, which is listed. It has nearly disappeared now but that would be all underneath so that you just walk up into this huge sort of cultural shopping centre.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Hanson.

**MR HANSON:** No, it has been very interesting, actually, hearing about the background.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I just go back?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you give your views to the committee about the architectural significance of the Fitters Workshop, how it sits in that site and how it relates to the other buildings, both in the site and elsewhere in Canberra?

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. I think—

**MRS DUNNE:** An architect's view.

**Mr Stewart:** The experts have said it is unique. It was a Murdoch building, was it not? He was the architect? It is a massive, more or less in situ, I think, concrete structure. I am not sure of the details actually, but it is unique in that area. It was a landmark, and we thought it should be a landmark in the future usage of that whole precinct.

And that was why when the refurbishment was done, the tile roofs were reinstated with these bright orange tiles, and we even wrote into the guidelines that no tiled roof of that colour be allowed anywhere in the foreshore. So it stood out as a landmark.

We were not trying to match it or anything. Anything new, we said, should be colourful, all sorts of colours of the rainbow, the whole cultural precinct, so that it would stand out from the rest of the more or less white buildings that now grace the site.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I follow up on that? Is the glazing on the big windows characteristic of industrial buildings at the time? Normally you see corrugated iron serrated buildings, but suddenly here is this—

**Mr Stewart:** Yes. I do not know why that sort of architecture was chosen but they are industrial-type buildings. I think they are steel framed. And in fact when it was refurbished, we changed the translucent glass to clear glass so that you could actually see out.

**MRS DUNNE:** It was not originally?

**Mr Stewart:** No. It was originally translucent so that you could not see in or out.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, do you have any further questions?

**MS PORTER:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne, did you have anything further?

**MRS DUNNE:** No, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Stewart, for appearing. It has been quite fascinating to



have you appear. We do thank you for taking the time to come in today and give us that background information. It has been very useful. Just to let you know, a transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you so that you can check that for accuracy.

**Mr Stewart:** Okay. Thanks very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**STYLES, MR HOWARD**, private capacity

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing in the education, training and youth affairs committee's inquiry into the future use of the Fitters Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct. I am going over the information here but I will do that for your benefit because you have just appeared here. Obviously we have held the hearings yesterday and today. We will also be holding a further hearing later in February; the government will appear then. I let you know also that the committee commissioned two studies of the acoustics of the Fitters Workshop; they will be available on the committee website today so that everyone will be able to view those.

In terms of housekeeping, I just want to make sure that you are aware of the privilege statement which is on the blue card in front of you—just so that you are aware of what is in that and the implications. Yes?

**Mr Styles:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I also want to let you know that proceedings today are being broadcast on the web, just so that you that are aware of that when you are giving evidence. Before we go to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Styles:** Yes. I am here to challenge the claim of perfect acoustics attributed to the Fitters Workshop. I run a one-man architectural practice doing technical documentation for some large busy practices in Canberra and other east coast capital cities. I have mentioned my concerns to some musical friends. They are astounded. Perfect acoustics is a front-page fact.

In looking around this space, committee room 1, I have to point out a few important features of relevance to performance spaces. Outside this room, and I notice that the door is open, are a bunch of noisy tradesmen, a bobcat, a man with a plate whacker, a pump, masonry-cutting saws, men with hammers and big reversing trucks. This room, like all quality performance spaces, is a box within a box. Here in committee room 1 we should be well isolated from aircraft noise, traffic noise and pedestrian noise.

A chap with a leaf blower could ruin a sound recording at the Fitters Workshop. However, the entertainment value is never diminished. For performers the audience is always forgiving. As long as the soprano keeps singing and smiling, sideways rain and flapping umbrellas do not diminish the joy of *Opera by the Lake*. Sydney's Theatre Royal is interesting. In the middle of the *Phantom* I could clearly hear the 9.29 train from Rooty Hill rumbling underneath. For all but one it was an interesting sound effect.

There are ways to isolate known noises, but they must be addressed before you build. The shell of the Fitters Workshop is a very poor barrier to outside noises. The areas of steel frame and single glazing, the gaps around the industrial doors and the tile roof make the chap with the leaf blower your worst enemy. The building skin is just not dense enough or well sealed enough to prevent aircraft and traffic noises affecting performances.

This interior space, committee room 1, is designed for speech. Acoustic panels, thick

carpets, soft furnishing and the audience are all in the calculation to stop noises generated by the speaker and others from echoing around the room forever. It was once part of each architect's work to do the sums to ensure that spaces were ideal for the task required. Public performance spaces like this have always had experts involved.

Acoustics has always been a standard part of building science education. I was an RMIT architecture student in 1970; the CSIRO building research division provided access and an introduction to the methods used for testing acoustic materials. There was a huge concrete echo chamber and an anechoic chamber to test and measure the performance of various materials and to calculate an acoustic absorption coefficient for each material. The acoustic calculations for architects took into account the volume of the space being considered, the area and the efficiency of the linings and the audience. The result was a reverberation time for the space measured in seconds. You did the sums; you adjusted the areas and the lining to get an ideal reverberation time of one to 1.6 seconds for speech and 1.6 to two seconds for music.

I have no doubt that when Sir Christopher Wren designed the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford in 1664 his technicians would have applied the 1664 rules to achieve a similar outcome. In that building the upper tiers are dangerously steep. This distributes the noise-absorbing audience over a large wall area. If your boring poetry performance is poorly attended, the reverberation time increases to compensate. I contend that the time it takes for noises to stop echoing in the Fitters Workshop exceeds the current empirical ideal. It is just wrong. The giant bathroom effect of noises bouncing off hard surfaces does not enhance music. I am keen to see the acoustic test results.

If the Fitters Workshop was erected today as a music performance space, the building owners would sue the designers for incompetence. Casual and informal music venues are fun and should be encouraged, but you must always ask the musicians about their performances. My niece plays viola with the opera and Brandenburg orchestras in Sydney. She gets involved with a lot of string quartet work in a lot of informal venues. They often cause problems for musicians. Music quality relies on musicians being able to hear each other. Many informal performance spaces, like the Fitters Workshop, interfere with the musicians' ability to hear one another.

For many years the science of sound has become a field for specialist building consultants. Many of them are not architects. The technical advancements in the field are enormous, and I for one appreciate the work they do and the care they take in striving for perfection. It is an ongoing sophisticated science.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. You have got a couple of statements in there and in your submission about the giant bathroom effect, I think you have said, and you made a couple of comments there about the echo and it being unacceptable. Is that based on your judgement having attended a performance there? I am just trying to get a sense of what that is based on.

**Mr Styles:** I have been into the building on many occasions. My office is in Kingston. Whenever the doors are open I go in there, click my fingers, make farting noises and do all sorts of things just to see what the reverberation time is like. There is no science in what I am doing. The science is in the calculations you do, the sums you do and the

area of absorption material. I have absolutely no doubt that when it was built as the Fitters Workshop it was almost unfit for human habitation. If somebody said to me that it has been used as a store for 40 years it would not surprise me.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you been in there when there has been an audience or is it only when it has been empty?

**Mr Styles:** I have been in there when the doors were open one day and there was a group of people and some large plywood boxes. Somebody was trying to make a speech. The whole place echoed and nobody could hear anything. It was just wrong. It was wrong for speech and it is wrong for music. I have not been to a musical performance there, but I have been in there quite a lot.

**THE CHAIR:** But not when there has been sort of like a—

**Mr Styles:** No, no. Never to a musical performance.

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that you have not seen the acoustics reports. I am just going to refer to a couple of things even though I know you have not seen them.

**Mr Styles:** I could end up looking like an absolute idiot if the acoustics people come back and say that it is fine for music.

**THE CHAIR:** I was just going to mention a couple of things that both the reports have said. In relation to your point about the speech, they have made that point that speech is difficult in that space. But it has talked about the reverb and about those measurements, saying that it is quite a unique space in terms of that—

**Mr Styles:** It is certainly unique.

**THE CHAIR:** and that, particularly for certain types of music, that reverb is appropriate and it is a unique space that does not have compare in Canberra, in terms of that reverberation time in particular.

**Mr Styles:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You said that it would not be appropriate for music. These two reports do say that it would be—that there are certain types of music that would be very good in that space. You said you have not heard music being played there. Has anyone given you feedback about some music that has played in there?

**Mr Styles:** No, absolutely not. It is just an impression. Sometimes things get a life of their own and I guess all of us have an obligation to put a hand up and say “I think this is wrong” if they sincerely think it is wrong. Off the top of my head, bagpipes, brass bands, percussion things and things like that would be totally unsuitable in that space. Then you say that it is a performance space that works only for whatever is defined. It seems to be an excessive waste of public money to keep a place empty for the few performances that fit into a category that will work well in that building. I have no doubt that if I came in here with a classical guitar and could play it, this room would work nearly perfectly for a classical guitar. If I came in here and played the last

post on a bugle, it would work perfectly. Nobody would say, “Gee, they were dreadful acoustics.” But I suspect in the Fitters Workshop they may not work that well.

**MR HANSON:** Is it not true, as we have had presented to us by a number of musicians, that there are different acoustic spaces that suit different music? So where you might want to have a brass band or where you might want to have amplified music, you might have one sort of venue with a slow reverb, but where you have got choral or slower tempo music, other sites are more suitable. So it is difficult to get one size fits all. If you are going to have a unique, very high quality, exceptional space, it is difficult to get something that would suit all forms of music.

What has been put to us is that when you fill the place with an audience, because there is a very different effect when you have an empty space compared to a full space, some of the points you have made about when it is empty resonate with the musicians. But the point that has been made to us by a number of musicians that have appeared and that have performed in that space is that once it is filled with an audience above a certain size, the acoustics are exceptional. That is what has been put to us. The evidence that you are presenting to us seems to contradict that but you have not actually provided any evidence of that, other than your gut feeling. You said in your submission that musicians would complain bitterly that they cannot hear each other and so on, but the musicians that we have spoken to say it is exceptional and it is one of their favourite venues in Australia. So what evidence have you got?

**Mr Styles:** A history of working on a lot of prominent buildings. I do specialist work for architects. Sometimes it is signings and sometimes it is doors. But whatever happens, I am involved occasionally with acoustic engineers. I spent some time at Gore Hill working on studio spaces, voiceover booths, transcription booths and things like that. I have a list of bits and pieces here regarding projects that I have been called in to work on, but not on acoustics. But every time I have to put a door into a prominent building, it has to be attached to a chunk of wall. Without thinking about it, I know the walls in this place are probably staggered studs. There is insulation in the wall. There are probably three layers of 16-ml plasterboard on the outside, two on the inside, and it still resonates and absorbs noise quite nicely for the purpose.

**MR HANSON:** But when it comes to the acoustics of this specific building, what evidence have you got that it is not appropriate or it is not exceptional?

**Mr Styles:** Only by using my ears and asking, as well as I can in every letter that I have written to the *Canberra Times*, that I am anxious to see the acoustic results, because the reverberation time is very high for musical performances. With respect to the Llewellyn Hall, from the most banal to the most absurd, at one end you have Steeleye Span with heavy amplified music and things like that. At the other end, I suppose 12 months ago, there was a man with a clarinet who, for the first four minutes, seemed to just produce a noise of breathing into a clarinet until it grew into a beautiful note. You think, “Single clarinet, Steeleye Span, the Llewellyn Hall works a treat.” And it is all to do with what acoustic engineers do.

**MR HANSON:** Another point from your submission is where you said that whenever an audience is entertained at the Fitters Workshop, there are usually half-a-dozen safe venues idle and empty a few minutes away. Why do you think it is that audiences

flock to the Fitters Workshop and leave those other venues empty?

**Mr Styles:** I have never seen them flock. If you put on a performance—

**MR HANSON:** Well, that is what you have said in your submission.

**Mr Styles:** But if you put on a performance, people come. It is just—

**MR HANSON:** Why do you think people are putting on performances at that venue and leaving others empty? Do you have any explanation?

**Mr Styles:** I have absolutely no idea.

**MR HANSON:** All right. Thank you.

**Mr Styles:** Can I just say, this book—

**MR HANSON:** I was wondering what that was.

**Mr Styles:** I always like props. This book is a book that my father used, and it has all the coefficient times. With every project, if you are in control of acoustics, and they are the projects where acoustic engineers are not involved, you just do the sums and you say, “Yes, that will work for the purpose.” This book was published in 1930, and I presume for the Fitters Workshop, it was not used. And you think, “Why would they do that?” Perhaps electrical fitters are lesser persons than people who go to the theatre. But it is dreadful acoustics even as a fitters workshop—just dreadful. It is painful.

**MS PORTER:** You made a comment this morning that you felt it would be an awful waste of space to have it unoccupied for a lot of the time and only being able to be used for certain purposes. A number of people have put before us the idea that it would be a place where a number of things could happen at different times of the day, if that could be accommodated. What are your comments about the fact that it could be used in the evening for certain things and during the day for exhibition space, for instance? Those are the kinds of things that have been put before the committee.

**Mr Styles:** Any performance space usually has 0.6 of a square metre of area for a standing audience and one square metre for a seated audience. You would need 0.6 of the same area as a pre-function space, undercover and isolated, to hand out programs and to do what normally happens in the foyer of buildings just like this, where people gather, they have coffee, they have drinks afterwards and things like that. So every performance space that I work on has got a pre-function area of about two-thirds the size of the auditorium. So to make it work as a performance space, you either have to have the plastic tents outside, held down with steel weights and things like that, but there is no awning. It is a draughty place. There is no safe escape. The fire brigade would have issues with the sliding doors. You need panic bars to get an audience out of a place, because at any point in time, the next-door neighbour’s gas bottle could explode or something like that. It just does not seem right as a performance space in any way.

I have absolutely no doubt that you could get in there and spend a lot of money and

turn it into a performance space, but then all of the pre-function areas have to be built in, the toilets and all the rest of it. But to turn it into a performance space, you may take away the perfect acoustics that are claimed by some. It just does not seem right to me. I do not have an ideal use for it, but I would assume that if any human habitation is going to go on inside the building, the acoustic engineers have their work cut out for them in modifying the building to make it work for any use.

**THE CHAIR:** I was going to ask about that, because you stated first-off that it was not fit for human habitation and that if someone said to you it was going to be used as a storage space, that would be appropriate. Are you saying that it is actually not fit for any sort of use, regardless of whether it was a performance space or used for Megalo?

**Mr Styles:** If there are people moving around in that space with shoes on, the noise generated in there just builds and builds, as every sound is generated by people moving around, talking to each other, shouting or using the PA system and saying: “Can you all settle down, please? I want to make a statement.” If somebody in the back corner is shuffling around or coughing, the noise just keeps growing and growing until the cacophony is just unbearable.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you saying that it would not actually be fit for any sort of use that would involve—

**MR HANSON:** That would involve people?

**Mr Styles:** Absolutely not. Any use that includes people living or working in that space will require some massive alterations to make it work.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Styles, are you aware of the design for the fit-out of the Fitters Workshop to convert it into a print studio?

**Mr Styles:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** Roughly, there is a proposal to put a one-storey pod inside the building and leave floor to ceiling spaces at either end—one for exhibition and one for part of the print workshop. Do you see, given your views that it is not a suitable place for people to live or work, that that sort of configuration would ameliorate the sound qualities?

**Mr Styles:** I could not comment. It all depends on linings and the resilience of the linings, and the absorption coefficient. But I have absolutely no doubt that if acoustic engineers are involved, it is just a matter of saying, “We need so many square metres of something that works a little bit like those fabric screens opposite.” For the acoustic engineers, it is all very easy stuff, but there are lots of features of this building, the Fitters Workshop, that preclude it from being used as a serious musical venue. It is just like the audio control room and things like that that would normally be built into a performance space of some description. So I could not comment on the modifications. If there is an acoustic engineer involved, I have absolutely no doubt that human habitation will be part of its future.

**MRS DUNNE:** Okay, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions, thank you, Mr Styles, for appearing today and taking the time to come in. We do appreciate that.

**Mr Styles:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** A transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you, so you can check that for accuracy. Thank you very much for coming in.



**COTTER, MR JIM**, private capacity

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Cotter, for appearing before the education, training and youth affairs committee inquiry into future use of the Fitters Workshop, Kingston arts precinct. I will just go over a few things. I have been going over it today for other witnesses.

**Mr Cotter:** I understand the process, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** We have held hearings yesterday and today. We will be holding further hearings later in February, at which the government will appear. The committee has commissioned two acoustics reports on the Fitters Workshop. They will be on the committee website from today, hopefully. So anyone will be able to go and view those reports.

I draw your attention first-off to the privilege card and statement which is on the blue card in front of you, just to make sure you have read that and are aware of the information in there.

**Mr Cotter:** Via email, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** The proceedings today are being broadcast live on the web, so that you are aware of that when you are giving evidence.

**Mr Cotter:** That does not change this statement?

**THE CHAIR:** No, it is just so that you are aware of that.

**Mr Cotter:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we go to questions from the committee, I invite you to make an opening statement.

**Mr Cotter:** You have my presentation via email, I assume. No; I would rather do a question and answer, and flow within that context, if that is okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Absolutely. Fantastic; that is absolutely fine. The first question is to do with your role in terms of composition and music. We have heard from a number of witnesses, yesterday and today, about the acoustic qualities of the Fitters Workshop. In terms of some of the issues you have raised here which talk about the acoustics not being appropriate, or about it not being an appropriate music venue, it would be interesting to get some information from you about what you have based your views on in terms of the Fitters Workshop.

**Mr Cotter:** An enormous number of conversations with colleagues, students and visiting professionals. The essence of the acoustics debate seems to me to be that it is a place that is quite fabulous for small chamber choirs, vocal music and maybe slow movements of string quartets. But I do not know that you would be able to sell a concert of second movements only for the night. Most musicians that have played

there, from the very eminent Larry Sitsky to the most recent one—in fact, the most recent one was this morning when I walked into the library and I had to rush off in a hurry because I thought I needed to be here earlier. A young woman who was a student said, “Where are you off to?” I told her where I was going; she looked at me and she said, “Which side are you on?”, assuming that I would be on the musical side. I told her and she said: “Thank goodness. I have played there and it is really dreadful; you cannot hear yourself.” It is difficult for a musician to perform when they cannot hear the cues of the other players.

The small choral ensembles prefer it because it makes them sound large. I have had that reiterated to me on the telephone by Larry Sitsky, who asked that I mention that today. He said, “Quote me.” What happens with the choral chamber groups is that the sound becomes vast and they sound aesthetically better because of it. This is why a lot of that material comes from the church tradition. I think I might have mentioned it in my submission. I have not reread my submission, so if I am wrong I apologise, but I think I suggested that if people wanted that vocal acoustic then they should go to St Andrews; it is a perfect place. We used to do that in the old days—magical concerts, magical.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you saying then that the acoustics at the Fitters Workshop are appropriate for those sorts of performances?

**Mr Cotter:** They are appropriate, but I think there are better places. I see the argument. I see why they are wanting it on that level. There are two arguments about why the Fitters Workshop should be taken away from screen printers and given to so-called musicians. If I might put another parenthesis in there, let me say that my concern is the division of the artistic community into musicians and visual artists. There are a lot of musicians who are not sitting in the musical camp because it is basically absurd to them. There are also, in my view, political machinations—not in the political sense that you operate in, but in the sense of people’s needs and desires to build their own fiefdoms, to have a physical space to move on with their own agenda. I do not think that should be part and parcel of taking the building.

**THE CHAIR:** I have to say that I have not seen any evidence of that at all, but that is just my comment.

**Mr Cotter:** Come to my office; you will see it on a daily basis.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Hanson?

**MR HANSON:** That is why I got into politics—to get away from politics.

**Mr Cotter:** Yes, as you would.

**MR HANSON:** I never knew that the arts community was so political. It seems then that there is a bit of a division—not just, as you have explained, between the printers and the musicians but within the performing arts community—

**Mr Cotter:** I am sorry to interrupt but I take—

**MR HANSON:** Not division but—

**Mr Cotter:** Yes, but it is some musicians; you have got to put “some” musicians.

**MR HANSON:** I am getting to that point.

**Mr Cotter:** Okay; my apologies.

**MR HANSON:** But it is between different groups within the performing arts community where some are saying that this is a fantastic space that gives us everything we want and there are others that will say that it does not.

**Mr Cotter:** True.

**MR HANSON:** Wouldn't it be fair to say, though—I think that among the people that have presented there have been mixed views as well. Some have said that it would not be good for fast tempo music or amplified music, for example. But we have also had explained to us that the reality is that if you are going to have a very good acoustic, no acoustic will suit all sorts of music. So you will have an acoustic space that will suit fast tempo music or amplified music and another acoustic that suits a slower tempo and the choral. Accepting that point, is it then not true that this is an exceptional space for certain forms of music, accepting that it is not for others?

**Mr Cotter:** Yes. I think that is a view that has been sadly—I am trying to choose my words carefully here—blown out of all proportion. When first this came to my attention it was a day when I was ferrying a lot of young musicians around for festival performances so I was not in my office. I had ABC on and I heard a colleague, Peter Sculthorpe, quoted as saying that it was the greatest acoustic in the southern hemisphere. No less recently than last Thursday that was spoken of as fact in the *Canberra Times* in an opinion piece.

Now—I am sure I am not imagining this—within an hour or an hour and a half Peter had released his own press release to say: “No; I did not say that. I said that it is good for certain things but it ain't true.” Yes? I am concerned about that. But I would like to go back to a historical reference. There is a beautiful album from my teenage years by Paul Horn playing solo flute inside the Taj Mahal. It seems to me that there is a parallel there. Nobody came in and tried to take over the Taj Mahal as a performance space only. That one moment in time with the Taj Mahal and its fabulous reverberation with solo flute was great, but you are not going to give it over to every Tom, Dick and Harry that wants to come in and record in the Taj Mahal.

**MR HANSON:** I suppose the Taj Mahal is an open space that is maintained as an open space where people can do that. No-one is suggesting that the Taj Mahal be taken over by a print workshop either.

**Mr Cotter:** Yes. I see why you went into politics.

**MR HANSON:** Indeed.

**THE CHAIR:** Just before we go on, we have got a signed statement from Peter

Sculthorpe, because there have been a number of claims about what he said.

**Mr Cotter:** Can we get access to that on the web?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, that will be published.

**Mr Cotter:** And is it contradicting what I have just said?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. He actually says that he stands by the statements he made on 8 October.

**Mr Cotter:** Does he quote which statements they are, because they were the first quotations—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; he states the ones that were on the ABC.

**Mr Cotter:** They were all on the ABC.

**THE CHAIR:** So we have actually got that.

**Mr Cotter:** That is my point. The first ones were that it was one of the greatest acoustic spaces in the Southern Hemisphere.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and he stands by the statements he made, so I think it is—

**Mr Cotter:** All right.

**THE CHAIR:** I think it is important to note that.

**Mr Cotter:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** A lot of people have been making claims about what he has and has not said, and we thought it was important to get that. That will be published. I just wanted to make that point.

**Mr Cotter:** Could you put on the record that Larry Sitsky, who is an equally eminent international composer, says that the place is a barn and, as a performer, that it is a horrid place to work.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; you have just put that on the record.

**Mr Cotter:** I will send you the quotes.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; thank you.

**MR HANSON:** Have you ever been out there and listened to a performance?

**Mr Cotter:** No.

**MR HANSON:** No?

**Mr Cotter:** No.

**MR HANSON:** I am just trying to get an assessment. Larry is a—

**Mr Cotter:** A performer and a composer, an emeritus professor at the ANU.

**MR HANSON:** What style of music? This is more orchestral.

**Mr Cotter:** It was chamber music.

**MR HANSON:** Chamber music.

**Mr Cotter:** Large chamber music.

**MR HANSON:** Large chamber music; okay. And his comments are that it would not be suitable for that style of music or that it is not suitable for—

**Mr Cotter:** It is not suitable for instrumental music. Basically, if it is useful, it is useful for small choral pieces. And there are other venues that do the same.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Cotter:** So what are you going to do? Keep one venue for a small fragment of musical performance? It does not quite make sense to us.

**MR HANSON:** Okay; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter?

**MS PORTER:** So to you it does not make sense to reserve this building as an empty space where nothing else happens for this small cohort of what you see as a suitable—

**Mr Cotter:** Correct; yes.

**MS PORTER:** Would it make more sense to you for it to be a multi-use space where on occasion those kinds of things could happen and—

**Mr Cotter:** Sorry to interrupt, but galleries are often used in that way for certain things. I think that from day one Megalo have always said that they are more than happy for people to come in and do things on occasion.

**MS PORTER:** Yes.

**Mr Cotter:** I do not see the problem.

**MS PORTER:** I was not suggesting that there was a problem.

**MR HANSON:** I suppose the issue is—I am sorry to interject—that if you see the designs—

**Mr Cotter:** I have not seen the designs; they have not been made available to me.

**MR HANSON:** much of the space gets taken up by interior buildings and so on and so forth. It is no longer usable, I suppose, as a full space for multi-use because it gets taken up with workshops and other facilities—office facilities and so on.

**Mr Cotter:** Given what you have just said, I would also make the point that having a reflective rectangular room that has X amount of reverberation does not necessarily guarantee a good acoustic. I will be fascinated to see what comes out in the interpretation of the figures by the—is it two distinct acoustic consultant reports that have been commissioned?

**MR HANSON:** That is right.

**Mr Cotter:** I will be fascinated to see that. I am teaching and dealing with people hour by hour, day by day during performance weeks and hearing the same story from the instrumental performers—that it is not a good acoustic. The arguments, it seems to me, from watching outside the political evolution, have been, with the exception of the Song Company, largely from amateur small choral groups. They are constantly being labelled “musicians”; that is slightly arguable.

**MR HANSON:** A number of people have appeared—

**THE CHAIR:** There were professional people as well.

**Mr Cotter:** Is there a list of the people that have given you evidence as musicians? Can I see that? Or can you give me a quick rundown of who they are?

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** It will be in the *Hansard*.

**MR HANSON:** It is on the *Hansard*, and they have made submissions as well.

**Mr Cotter:** But not while I speak to you today. Can I do that? I would be intrigued.

**MR HANSON:** I suppose.

**Mr Cotter:** Given the volatility of the whole thing—I, like most of you, probably saw the *Canberra Times* front page this morning and went “Oh, my God” yet again.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee has to take everybody’s evidence and consider that.

**Mr Cotter:** Yes, absolutely. That is the game; I understand that.

**THE CHAIR:** There is you giving evidence; there are other people. Everyone’s views are valid. It is up to the committee to consider this sort of information that is put before us. We do not want to get into a situation where we are determining whether or not someone has valid information.

**MR HANSON:** If, having heard the evidence presented by other people, you wish to make a further submission based on the evidence that you see in the *Hansard* and so on, we would be more than happy to receive a further submission from you. Other groups have done this; I think Megalo is going to do it as well.

**Mr Cotter:** That was not made clear to me. Thank you; that is great.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, if you would like to.

**Mr Cotter:** Terrific.

**MR HANSON:** If you read the *Hansard* and see that someone said X and you refute that, then you can put in a submission.

**Mr Cotter:** Yes. I am trying to be non-personal, but I do have a lot of stuff that I find reprehensible in the behaviour of a lot of the people involved in this whole process. The misinformation—there has been bullying going on from where I see—not that which was talked about in the *Canberra Times* this morning.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Cotter:** I am not up to pulling that out until I have seen who has talked and what they have had to say and be clear about that. But I removed from your focus; I apologise.

**MS PORTER:** That is not a problem, Mr Cotter. I was just trying to get an idea of what your opinion was, if you had an opinion, about that suggestion that has come from numbers of people about having the space being available for different people and different kinds of performances or visual art at different times of the day, so having a multi-use kind of venue rather than a specific venue for a particular purpose. I just wondered what your views were about that.

**Mr Cotter:** I do not have a particular view. I would ask why. Why would we go to that? I would have to cogitate on that a bit longer. I think it is taking that which is being held up as the good thing on this side of the good thing on that side. There is a long reverberation time in a reflective rectangular shell—which will not remain that if you let an architect anywhere near it; let us face it. I was the liaison person on the jazz building, the Karmel building, for the ANU with the architects, and I am here to tell you that what look like sensible things on paper do not happen. I think I mentioned in my submission that we have spent an inordinate amount of money trying to rectify things, and we supposedly had the best acoustic consultants in the country. It is not a done deal.

**MS PORTER:** Another question is buzzing around my head. You mentioned the Llewellyn Hall. We have listened to many people this morning; I think it was you that mentioned the—

**Mr Cotter:** No.

**MS PORTER:** No it was not.

**Mr Cotter:** No, but I live in the building so ask me a Llewellyn Hall question.

**MS PORTER:** Okay. The person talked about Llewellyn Hall being a good space for a whole variety of different music, such as one person playing one instrument very quietly ranging to a whole large performance by a large group. It could be a very noisy kind of performance like percussion, for instance. Perhaps I should not describe it as noisy, but anyway.

**Mr Cotter:** It is all noise.

**MS PORTER:** Other people have talked about the expense of hiring that particular space. Even though it has got wonderful acoustics, if it has, in your opinion, do you think that—one of the factors that we are faced with is the fact that we do have a lot of quite high quality amateur performance in this town, both theatrical and with music as well. Just because they have the word “amateur” in front of them is not to say that they necessarily they produce poor quality.

**Mr Cotter:** No, indeed; “amateur” means because you love it, which is great.

**MS PORTER:** Yes. Do you think that the cost factor is one of the factors that is creating a lot of issues for them in hiring a suitable space for them to be able to present and for the population of Canberra to be able to go and listen to this lovely music or whatever it is.

**Mr Cotter:** Yes. The Llewellyn Hall was designed by expensive architects as part of the whole School of Music process. It was not what you hear today. Many years later, another group of acoustic consultants were brought in very, very expensively, and did a refurbishment. Now it is terrific. It is not a good comparison because if you wanted a space the size of the Fitters Workshop, why would you go and look at the Llewellyn Hall as an alternative? I would say, “Go to Wesley,” because they have spent a reasonable amount of money and have a very fine acoustic that is movable. So it shifts by reflective surfaces being turned inwards this way, left, right et cetera. There are people that can explain that better than I can. That would be one.

If you wanted to have a performance in the Fitters Workshop, I would say to you that if you are a small chamber choir and wish to do that repertoire and you want that acoustic, go to St Andrew’s. It is probably the cheapest venue in town. A couple of bucks in the plate and you are away. I cannot say any more about that, sorry.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Cotter, you are a composer?

**Mr Cotter:** I am a composer. I have composed theatre professionally since 1975. I have been in academia for a bit over 10 years, because my children like to eat and wear shoes like other kids. The arts is not a good place to bring up children and feed them on a regular basis. I have worked in every major theatre company in the country. I have worked in the Opera House. I have worked in the main theatre in Toowoomba with the Youth Theatre. I have worked in everything in between scout halls. I would say that is a fair number of decades of practical experience.



**MRS DUNNE:** Has your work been performed at the Fitters or through the international music festival?

**Mr Cotter:** No, because I have questioned Chris on a lot of things, so I am persona non grata except when he wants something, so he sends me a bribe. The latest one was an offer to have some of my musical songs with works from Dorothy Hewett and other theatrical performances in the next one. It was sent via a student. I said, “Thanks, but no thanks; I am not interested in being bought,” which was the object of the thing.

**MR HANSON:** I make the point that nobody that we have heard from has suggested that Megalo is not a very important arts institution.

**Mr Cotter:** Rightly so.

**MR HANSON:** And no-one has suggested that they should not have a place at the Kingston foreshore either.

**Mr Cotter:** Indeed not.

**MR HANSON:** Four million dollars has been made available for them, and the space available. One of the proposals that has been put forward is that Megalo would be provided with a purpose-built facility at the Kingston foreshore with the \$4 million. There would be no requirement to buy land or anything like that. That would allow the Fitters Workshop to be retained as a space.

**Mr Cotter:** As is.

**MR HANSON:** As is, essentially, yes.

**Mr Cotter:** I think that is a mistake.

**MR HANSON:** You think that is a mistake?

**Mr Cotter:** Yes, absolutely.

**MR HANSON:** Why?

**Mr Cotter:** Because it is a highly reflective rectangular barn, as so many people have said to me. I am talking about a lot of discussion with people. That is what I do. “How was your performance? How was yours? How was this? What was wrong with it? Why did it fall apart in the third movement? I heard it was crappy there.” “He couldn’t hear me do that and missed that lead.” It is not a good concert space. I reiterate that it is good for chamber, unaccompanied choirs—not much else. You could probably do, as I said before, chamber music of slow movements so that there is not too much movement of notes around the molecules.

I have heard various people suggest that if you put bodies into the room, that rebalances, and that is absolute fact. It is true. But I am not talking about it being done in an empty room. The complaints from the performers are much more on when it is

about the rehearsal. It does not get any better in the performance, even with a full house.

**MR HANSON:** And accepting your point that it is not suitable for all forms of music but it is for some, what is the argument that seems to be so strong that you see that Megalo must go into that space, and it cannot be used and retained for the choral or the slower forms of music?

**Mr Cotter:** It is a big rectangular barn with fabulous lights—that which brought us the art of the Renaissance, for God’s sake. Maybe an architect could come up with another rectangle with great light, too; maybe. But it is there. What are we screaming around for?

**MS PORTER:** My question is around Emeritus Professor Larry Sitsky.

**Mr Cotter:** Who is happy to be contacted. His wife is in hospital, which is why—

**MS PORTER:** No, that is fine. I just wondered whether he has actually had his music performed in there.

**Mr Cotter:** He has performed in there.

**MRS DUNNE:** When was that?

**Mr Cotter:** We do not know. No idea, sorry.

**MS PORTER:** We can find that out, I am sure.

**THE CHAIR:** We can find that out, yes.

**Mr Cotter:** It would have been the Canberra Festival. What is Chris’s little thing called?

**MS PORTER:** Pro Musica.

**Mr Cotter:** Pro Musica.

**MRS DUNNE:** The National Music Festival.

**MS PORTER:** Okay, he performed as part of that?

**Mr Cotter:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Okay.

**Mr Cotter:** It is interesting to me that it is only in the last 24 or 48 hours that I am starting to hear much about Pro Musica publicly in this debate. It has always been choral singers et cetera. I am a lot unhappy about the role that the major players in Pro Musica have played during this whole process. I would like to come back once I have read other evidence and perhaps talk about that.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to remind you, I think we need to be careful what is said about certain groups.

**Mr Cotter:** But if I read my blue form, can't I say what I say?

**THE CHAIR:** True, but it is being broadcast publicly and everything is recorded in *Hansard*. I think it is worth making that point.

**Mr Cotter:** Okay. That was the purpose of my question at the beginning.

**MR HANSON:** I am certainly interested in your view here, because it does seem that there is a—

**Mr Cotter:** There is a subtext. I have worked in theatre. I look at a script; I see the subtext. I am sorry to be arrogant but that is the way you learn in theatre. There is a very big subtext in here, and it has got nothing to do with acoustics.

**MR HANSON:** Could you explain what the subtext is?

**Mr Cotter:** If you have got a building, then getting funding for ongoing projects is a lot easier. It is as simple as that. I think it is a land grab. Why don't we just give Megalo a wagon, give Pro Musica a wagon, whoever comes up first has the land? It is just as sensible as what we are doing.

**MR HANSON:** So you are suggesting there are groups that are pushing for this because it will enable them to get additional funding or more prominence within the music—

**Mr Cotter:** I do not know precisely, but it looks to me like we are building a power base. I have seen it before. Shakespeare wrote about it. Nothing is new. I am sure you see it in your daily life, too.

**MR HANSON:** Well, yes. I am just interested in that you seem to be—

**Mr Cotter:** Rather than go into specifics, I would rather look at the record and come back and talk to you quite specifically.

**MR HANSON:** Okay.

**Mr Cotter:** Because I have had a couple of complaints about the word that was used in the *Canberra Times* in other circles, the “bullying” word.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. There being no further questions, thank you, Mr Cotter, for appearing here today.

**Mr Cotter:** You are more than welcome, Ms Bresnan. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

**THE CHAIR:** A copy of the transcript of today's hearing will be sent to you.

**Mr Cotter:** Will be sent to me?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the evidence you have given here today.

**Mr Cotter:** Thank you. Do I have to sign it and send it back as a true copy?

**THE CHAIR:** No, you do not have to do that. Thank you, Mr Cotter.

**MR HANSON:** But if you do not agree with elements, you can—

**THE CHAIR:** You will be able to let the committee know.

**MR HANSON:** And the other hearings that we had yesterday and earlier today are online as well for you to review if you would like to.

**Mr Cotter:** All right. I will get somebody younger to find that for me.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. This hearing is adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 11.09 am.**