

Music Community Engagement Report

Prepared by Craig Birch-Morunga for Save Dunedin Live Music and the Dunedin City Council

Introduction

A range of people from the Dunedin Music community were engaged to discuss the issues the live music scene currently faces and identify solutions. To enable this process, focus groups were organized by an individual independent from Save Dunedin Live Music and the Dunedin City Council. All effort was made to find individuals that represented a cross-section of the Otepoti music community. Participants were prompted with a series of issues identified at a public hui, which they were then asked to further explore. They then identified further issues and possible solutions.

Participants identified current challenges as a lack of accessible, centralized information for musicians to organize events and safely practice. There was also concern raised that there was no visible path for musicians looking to further their careers. There was a distinct lack of community engagement beyond members of the actual music community. Other challenges were the lack of a midsized venue and unclear noise regulations. Younger participants were concerned that was not enough focus on youth events or venues.

There was an overwhelming need for centralized information that consistently came up unprompted in all focus groups. Participants were also very passionate about the need for a mid-sized venue to be supported by the council. Clear rules around noise control were defined as an essential topic to be addressed by the council directly. Their ideal solution to many of the issues raised was a music hub which would provide safe, accessible rehearsal spaces, information and mentoring for the wider music community.

Focus Groups

There were 6 focus groups in total, 2 of which had a targeted demographic. These two groups were venue owner/managers and youth. The remaining groups were the result of an open call to the community via the Dunedin City Council's creative mailing list, several posts on the 'Dunedin Music' Facebook group and word of mouth within the community.

Group size for the focus groups was typically 4-8 people. Focus groups responded to issues and challenges that had been identified by the music community and were asked to provide feedback on possible solutions to address these issues. Groups were encouraged to deviate from the slideshow where further discussion provided creative solutions or overlooked challenges.

Focus groups each followed the same general structure where they were shown slides as conversational prompts. They were asked what they loved about the Dunedin Music Scene, to identify the main challenges faced, and what was the most important issue faced from a list of previously identified issues which are as follows: noise control, rehearsal spaces, mid-sized venue, facilitating events, funding & promotion for local music, and music hub. Participants then had the option to bring their own issues forward. Following this, focus groups then went through each option individually, in depth, with the intention of finding out specifically what participants want and need in regards to each option.

What do you love about the Dunedin music scene?

When asked this question focus groups were mostly united on these aspects of the Dunedin music scene:

- The entry level is incredibly achievable, meaning anyone could theoretically start a band and put on a show.
- The community itself is inclusive, supportive and diverse.
- The music being created and released is unique and diverse in genre.
- Dunedin's musical heritage draws people to the city and influences musicians to this day. To quote one member of the focus groups, *"Dunedin is known for having a music scene. Whether or not you want to think about just the Dunedin sound, this place is an amazing breeding ground for so many different types of sounds."*

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the music scene?

The challenges varied from group to group, with most agreeing on some aspects and others only coming up in certain groups. Here are the notable responses.

- The lack of an accessible, centralized location of information.
Currently information is scattered resulting in a logistical nightmare trying to gather the required knowledge to, for example, hire a PA, sound technician, what to do to put on a show, where to put on a show. The list goes on and was discussed at length with all groups.
- Lack of a mid-sized venue.
With the lack of a mid-sized venue there is no clear pathway for musicians wanting to progress in their chosen profession. There is also nowhere for larger touring acts to play, which results in Dunedin being left off the touring circuit for a lot of acts who would fill a mid-sized venue.
- Safe places to practice.
Somewhere that is not in danger of being shut down by noise control or possible eviction.
- Unclear noise regulations.
With no parameters to work with, participants find the current regulations (or lack thereof) unreasonable.
- No visible path for musicians.
With the lack of a mid-sized venue and the scattered nature of information, the steps to progress have become concealed and the gap remaining is too large of a leap for musicians who begin here. The result of this is musicians having to leave Dunedin if they want to grow.
- Community engagement.
The music community and the wider community are very separate. Which results in a lot of the wider community not valuing the music community.
- Limited focus on the youth sector.
No youth/alcohol free venues for younger musicians to learn how to play in a gig environment.

Noise Control

Noise control was one of the topics which animated people. This was mainly in regards to how unclear the parameters are.

- Regarding the possibility of SPL meters used in Auckland most of the focus groups agreed that there would be no point in having them without first having clear rules around noise control. This would mean definite parameters to work within and these parameters being easily available for the public to find.
- Regarding Wellington city's sound insulation in entertainment precincts, the reaction was positive. Some were questioning how and at whose cost this would happen. Notable suggestions were
 - Grants to be made available that mirror those given to subsidize the cost of heating insulation, with a defined due date.
 - Grants available for venues to install sound insulation.
- One focus group mentioned legislation passed in the UK regarding existing venues. The simplified version was that residents who moved into close proximity of existing venues were required to install more sound insulation. If the required insulation had not been installed authorities would not respond to noise complaints from these residents until the renovations had taken place.
- A sentiment shared by a few of the focus groups was that Dunedin is only getting bigger and will continue to grow, which means it will also naturally become noisier. A good faith gesture to the music community now might save future noise issues further down the line.

Rehearsal Spaces

All of the focus groups were in agreement that a rehearsal space would be an incredible asset to the music community. Some suggestions for what the space could include were as follows.

- The rooms would need to be sound proofed. Which would in turn make them safe from being shut down by noise control.
- Possible use of university rehearsal rooms would save a new build or refurbishment.
- Flexible open hours.
- Affordable.
- Only a low number of staff should be necessary.
- Central location. If it is too far from the CBD, people wouldn't use it.
- Deposit system to discourage poor treatment of property.
- Online booking.
- Council backing or involvement would make the space feel less at risk of being shut down.
- Quick equipment tutorials if necessary. Which means staff would need to know the equipment.

Music Hub

Focus groups were initially confused as to what a music hub was but once the general idea was presented there was a lot of positivity towards the concept. Some ideas that were put forward for an ideal facility are as follows.

- Venue (big and small. Possibly multiple venue areas).
- Rehearsal spaces.
- Music information center (a person you could ask or point you in the direction of information).
- A touring/booking agency.
- Marketing, tax, logistical advice (this could be a part of the info center).
- Skate park (this suggestion comes from an existing music hub in Europe which has several venues, a skate park and accommodation for touring bands.)
- Hang out area.
- Busking spaces.
- The space would need continued promotion within the music community to make sure it was being used.
- It would need to be affordable and accessible.
- Possibility of a mentoring program.
- The people who would run the space could also moderate the online resource for information.

Mid-Sized Venue

Every group was passionate about the need for a mid-sized venue. These venues are a key component of any thriving music scene.

- With no suitable mid-sized venue:
 - There is a crucial step missing in the development of a musician's career. To grow as a musician, you currently have to leave Dunedin.
 - No venue for bigger touring acts from the wider scene to play.
 - In turn this means Dunedin is being left off the national touring circuit.
 - Which means there are no supporting roles for local talent.

Following are some points about what the focus groups would like to see in a possible mid-sized venue.

- Fully equipped for shows (e.g., full PA, lighting etc. (not essential as hiring is an option))
- Ample backstage facilities. A quote from one of the participants in regards to this issue:
"When they revamped the town hall, they made the choral room smaller. Which means that the city choir and the men's choir no longer fit in there to warm up. We have to warm up in two different spaces before a concert and then come on stage from each side!"
- Retractable tiered seating, so the room can be set up how you need.
- It doesn't need to be perfect; it just needs to be.
- It would have to be a multipurpose venue to be financially viable. Some suggestions were:
 - Dunedin Sound Museum and venue.
 - Craft/secondhand markets.

Events

In regards to events, focus groups were unanimous that the council could have a bigger role driving events in Dunedin. With a lot of support for both organizing events and the assistance of other entities to organize events through guiding people through difficult processes. Following are suggestions from the focus groups:

- Access to someone to help navigate the DCC processes in regards to booking green spaces or other venues.
- More lenient policies around events in green spaces.
"I feel like the last thing they want is for the gig to happen."
"Summer could be a lot more vibrant with music around the city."
- Huge enthusiasm from all groups about outdoor events.
- Council needs to be actively driving more events.
"I think they need the infrastructure to help people out, like when people go to put on events, it should be a well-worn path."
- There need to be more shows in the octagon and the gardens. Using existing structures more.
- Matariki could be a bigger festival for Dunedin.

Promotion and Funding

The following are some ideas from the focus groups about how the council could help promote local music.

- Local gigs and music info advertised in our visitor centers.
"It should be a given, with established venues having gigs every weekend."
- Funding for events needs to be more accessible.
- The council needs to be championing our local music to instill value in the art for the wider community. For example, advertising a group's album release on social media.
- More music in novel places.

Information

The need for centralized information is overwhelming. In every focus group everyone agreed access to information was a major issue. Unprompted, focus groups would start creating their own version of the online toolkit talked about in this topic, well before we had gotten to this point in the conversation.

Notable things participants felt necessary for such a resource were as follows:

- Artist and venue database.
- Online forum.
- Moderation is necessary.
- Up to date information.
- Health and Safety guidelines.
- Available funding.

The Future

The following is what the focus groups said when asked what they would like to see in the future.

- Encouragement to start venues, not just preserving the current ones.
- Priority given to established venues regarding noise complaints.
- Creative gigs. E.g., Gigs in interesting places with interesting themes.
- Assistance getting past 'pay to play' obstacles.
- Information easily available and accessible
- Help to bring the infrastructure up to standard so the scene can thrive on its own.
- Someone from the music community to give us a voice on the council.
- More thought and effort put into the youth sector.
- Less separation between all groups within the music scene, so we can grow together and help one another.
- Continued open discussion between all parties involved to work together for better solutions that benefit everyone.

In Conclusion

To conclude, all issues presented to the focus groups were deemed to be important and all of them will need support to help the music community grow. The general consensus was that any help would be greatly appreciated but the larger tasks are the ones that will require more focus from the council. For example, an online resource for information, noise regulations and a mid-sized venue or music hub. Supporting further infrastructural development will in turn help the music community to thrive on its own. The music community is an integral part of the Otepoti cultural landscape and we cannot afford to lose it.