

TRANSCRIPT

Sound As Ever (Australian Music Vault Podcast) Episode 2 Accessibility in Live Music

Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

Welcome to *Sound As Ever* an Australian Music Vault podcast produced by young content producers and radio makers interested in exploring stories and issues in the Australian music scene. This episode focuses on accessibility in the music industry. What are the barriers that preventing people from enjoying live music and how can these situations be overcome. This episode was produced by Rebecca Maakasa and Bridget Bourke.

Sound: *A patron approaches a busy city gig, there's footsteps on a pavement and the chatter of some young sounding friends excited for a night out seeing their favourite bands. A loud, muffled bassy voice of a bouncer signals that one of the friends may have trouble getting through the door.*

Bouncer Character: Ah sorry, the band is playing upstairs tonight...

Music: Mallrat – Uninvited

Narration: There's a gig going on in Melbourne's CBD every night (thanks to no lockout laws) but a large portion of the music lovers aren't able to soak it up!

Do you remember the first gig you ever went to? It was probably memorable, because you had a good time with your mates and saw a band you loved.

In this episode we take a look at accessibility and realise that the live music scene is not welcoming for everyone as you might assume. We must emphasise that in this episode we didn't have the scope to cover all access needs, and our interviews lent an ear to mainly physical access.

Accessibility is a broad, and multifaceted topic. Over the last few months, myself Rebecca, and Bridget have been investigating the state of accessibility in the live music scene of Melbourne. It is evident that making spaces welcoming for all, falls not to one person or organisation.

In this episode, we explore physical access and shine a light onto areas of the live music spaces that might not be as welcoming as you might assume.

This is the *Sound As Ever* podcast.

Music: Bad//Dreems - Gutful

Rosie: Hello, my name is Rosie, I'm 27 years old and I have spina bifida so I'm a wheelchair user and I also use walking sticks. At the moment I think one of my favourite artists would be Bad Dreems, I've been really into the Preatures new album and Dan Sultan. I think I like a lot of different music.

Music: The Preatures - Is This How You Feel

Rosie: So I went to see the Preatures at The Forum and they have actually recently renovated, so what was once an already accessible venue, has become a now more accessible venue, which kinda tripped me out because they were already pretty good!

Music: The Preatures - Is This How You Feel

Narration: The Forum is one of the many music venues across Melbourne that has been working on their accessibility so all patrons can enjoy their shows. Rosie says it's improved since the first time she attended and believes that The Forum have continued to focus on and improve access needs throughout the years she's been going there...

Rosie: They're definitely better at communicating. As soon as they saw us they were like "Come in, where's your ticket" and they explained to us that the venue has changed and this is what it is now and this is where you can go to the toilet and other places you can seat yourself so you can see the stage.

Having the toilet in a space where like other people can't see it is a really good thing too, because there's nothing I hate more than seeing 5 'able bodies' walk out of a disabled toilet. [laughs] Cause I think that people don't realise it is such a big toilet because you need to be able to fit a wheelchair beside it! And that even though they have to wait in line for a toilet, they have 5 or 6 toilets, whereas we have 1.

Communication is a really big thing yes, definitely think so when it comes to having a venue that's accessible, I think. Attitudes, people's attitudes is a huge, huge thing.

Narration: Rosie is one of many music fans in Australia attending gigs in a wheelchair. We also spoke with Pauline Vetuna, who is a music lover and a disabled wheelchair user and is forced to fight against ableism wherever she encounters it.

Music: Huntly - Kate's Bed (Alice Ivy Remix)

Pauline: I am a full time wheelchair user, I consistently find that I respond to invites for gigs all the time from friends and people in my networks and I always have to ask "is it accessible?". And more and more I have to explain what that means to me, specifically, because from years of experience, I've realised that when you tell people, able bodied people - or ask them - "is it accessible?" they'll often say "yes" because their understanding of what that means is very limited.

Narration: Pauline often finds it difficult to get to the venue in the first place, and then manoeuvring inside the building is even more so. When I sat down with Pauline, she expressed strongly the impacts it has on her when access is denied.

Pauline: Just like ah, this shit again.[Laughs] Oh really it's just so tiring ... people can't see me I am a black woman and I use a wheelchair. So it's frustrating because I have to labour and explain and educate for all of those things all the time.

Pauline: More recently I was invited to a gig I sent them a couple of messages just asking if it was accessible. And I actually was specific. I asked them "is it accessible, I use a manual wheelchair" and I even gave the dimensions of the wheelchair I think. And I asked them is there an accessible toilet and I was told "Yes"...get to the venue, uh and I can certainly get in on street level, but the toilet's aren't accessible. Now if there is no usable toilet on site - the venue it's not accessible. And a lot of people don't seem to understand that. If I go to a place and I'm unable use the toilet, obviously I need to go home. [Laughs] I can't be in public without a toilet somewhere in the vicinity. So I'm constantly having to explain that to people. A lot of venues don't understand that, even um a lot of artists. Because I was invited to that venue by friends, who know me [Laughs] and my disability but even they were not aware of it. So it's something -with access it needs to be something that you intentionally think about.

Music: Huntly - Kate's Bed - Alice Ivy Remix

Narration: Rosie tells us about her favourite band of all time, and how she's always front and centre at every gig. But not this time.

Rosie: It was fully accessible so it was flat to get in, they had a disabled toilet, from what I gather the venue was new, or I'd just never been there before. We were seeing a band we had seen 1 million times before. And we went to the front of the stage like we always did but then some bouncers came up and said "You can't be there, it's not safe for you" and we're thinking well we go to the front of the stage all the time, we go to gigs all the time, we see this band all the time, y'know this is not fair.

Because there are so many different types of disabilities you know it is hard and I do understand why they worry about us getting hurt. But if a person is saying to you quite clearly, we do this all the time, we go to the front. If the crowd gets crazy we will move. Like we are capable of doing that. Like I think it's important to listen to that. Keep an eye on us just in case because that is there job. But also kind of respect that we are human and that we know what we're doing and if we don't know we wouldn't be here because we would be worried.

I was really mad at the security guards and really mad at the band themselves, because we had seen them so many times yet they still tried to side with the security guards, and make us move.

I ended up writing a review on the Facebook page of the venue saying well this is ridiculous, how can someone who's so accessible have such crappy attitudes? They never responded or anything, but now when I go back they let us in, go to the front. No issues. Yeah.

Narration: Pauline has had similar experiences to Rosie in being denied and has found it frustrating when often all that is needed is removing a simple obstacle.

Pauline: I remember one time I had been told that something wasn't accessible and I looked at the manager, and looked at the thing that was blocking me from entering the building, and I looked at him again and I just gave him a look, I didn't even say anything. And he flushed pink and went inside to try and find something to make that obstruction go away. And that's really what needs to happen. You need to make yourself physically present, you need to

make yourself heard as a marginalised person. But I can't stress the importance of allies. Because this shouldn't fall on disabled people alone. We're already dealing with enough. If you really care about your disabled friends and family. And if you care about it just on principal. This is something that you need to vocalise and stand up for in the same way that you would with any other human right.

Music: SIMONA - Breakfast Of Champions (Various Asses Remix)

Narration: In their frustration, both women have reached out to venues and artists to let people know that being denied access is not okay.

Rosie: Sometimes you can go to a venue, the attitudes can just be really crap. Like they're like "oh no, we're not accessible, this building is really old" and you're just like "I've come all this way to see this band, you can't just kick me out" kind of thing. Or they don't know how to help you. There was one venue that now has a little ramp to get into which is fantastic. They were always like "oh we know what to do we know how to help you". But they will try and like push you out forward and I was like "I'm gonna tumble out of my wheelchair" But they just weren't listening to what I was saying. They were like "oh no no we've been doing this for years" I'm like "So have I [laughs] and let go of me! Because you're helping me in a really bad way."

Also I find some venues, they, use their disabled toilet as storage. So they have one, but when you get there, they're like "oh can you wait a bit while we take everything out of the disabled toilet because we're currently using it as storage."

I'll get someone coming up to me saying oh it's so great you're out - my brother or sister's in a wheelchair. And I'll always say to them, can you please tell your brother or sister that they should go out more because people like you are going out and telling other disabled people that it's so amazing you're out because their brother or sister aren't going out so please - tell them they can go out and have a good time - and let them go out! Invite them out!

Narration: As the late great disability advocate, writer and comedian Stella Young said "My disability exists not because I use a wheelchair, but because the broader environment isn't accessible. Having to constantly negotiate spaces takes a toll."

Pauline: Start to question your own ableist thinking. Because you have it, even if you don't think you do, you have it. Start to educate yourself about the social model of disability. Social model of disability is the model of disability that disabled activists use. Prior to that the medical model of disability was pervasive and it still is in some circles, especially the medical profession and the medical model holds that people are disabled because of their physical impairment.

The social model of disability emphasises the social structures and barriers that prevent us from living full and free lives. So I have an impairment, but I am disabled by the discrimination that society perpetuates against me. So the emphasis is on the social barriers, and not the impairment. Which I can live with. The impairment is actually fine. I manage it. It's all this other stuff around me that prevents me to live the way that other people do.

Music: SIMONA - Breakfast Of Champions (Various Asses Remix)

Pauline: Just complaining. Lodging a complaint. Asking questions. Doing so in a public way. Doing so on someone's public page. So that other people can see that response. That is making ourselves visible and just making our voices heard consistently, even though there will always be some push back or people will ignore us. But I do think it's important for people with physical disabilities, and all kinds of disabilities to make ourselves visible in these spaces. That is a form of protest. It really depends on how I'm feeling in that week.[Laughs] Whether I'm willing to go through that process.

Rosie: I personally feel that with my friends, some of them don't go out because of reasons like they assume a lot of things won't be accessible because a lot of things aren't. I think having carers that won't take them out past a certain time or some of them rely on public transport to get to the place as well. If it is not near public transport or if it's near a tram, a lot of trams won't be accessible. That kind of deters people from going out as well.

Music: IV League - Sylvia

Narration: There are many initiatives being experimented with in Melbourne to try and break down the barriers that prevent access. Here's Nicki, the founder of Bandmates Victoria...

Nikki: Bandmates Victoria is a brand new initiative, it's been going for a year and it matches people with and without disabilities and mental health issues with volunteers to go out to see live music. So in 2017 it's a pilot project it was co-designed by people with disabilities and mental health issues and people who work in the music industry. In 2018 we've reapplied for more funding and we're moving out across another 10 municipalities and into regional Victoria as well. You can live anywhere to access Bandmates Victoria - for us partnering with the different municipalities meant that they can help with the matching process - because we really want to match people that number one - like the same kind of music - so important - number two - live nearby.

Narration: Rosie is familiar with the Bandmates program through her wider community and sees it as a positive step. I think it is a great initiative, like I think it's the best thing absolutely ever! Because the one way to change people's perspective is to see people with disabilities out. Having this program called bandmates where the volunteer takes a person with a disability out to night life. Is the best thing ever because it stops that barrier of "how will I get to this venue?" because you have that volunteer that's willing to help you get there and then more people with disabilities will go out because that barrier is gone! And the next barrier will just be "is the venue we're going to see this band accessible?" And if the answer is "yes" - then boom you're out! You're doing things just like everybody else!

Music: Huntly - Tempelhof

I'm Elly or Elspeth, Elspeth Scrine and I am an artist. I play with an electronic 3 piece called Huntly, we make 'doof' you can cry to. I also am a music therapist, and super passionate about music. And I volunteer with organisations to try and make the music industry a more safe and inclusive and accessible place.

Narration: Elly is a coordinator at Listen!, a grass roots organisation set-up to spark dialogue around and promote the work of marginalised communities in the music industry including women, and people who are gender non-conforming, LGBTQIA+, of colour and who have a disability.

Elly: If you're artist I think you've got a huge platform - particularly like bigger artists who are out on a stage - you've got however many people that are out there listening to your every word and it is so important to use that platform. I think people working for events and venues have a huge responsibility and it takes active work.

Music: The Preatures - Is This How You Feel?

Narration: Rosie agrees, it's a shared responsibility.

Rosie: I get a little bit obsessed, so I see artists more than once - so they tend to recognise me because I'm in a wheelchair - I stand out! And I'm going to all their gigs. So I would like bands like that to acknowledge that they have a person with a disability going to their gigs and maybe when their organising when they're going to play to make sure that venue is accessible and actually ask those questions like "hey is this venue accessible?" Because with a few bands that I see a lot I ask them about that and they're like "Oh well someone else organises where their playing." And surely you can talk to that person that organises your venues. Like surely you're in contact with them and say "hey there's disabled girls that go to our gigs - can we make it more accessible?" Just think about whether you want to include everyone or do you want the world to be inclusive? Or do you just want able bodies to be able to go to gigs?

Music: SIMONA - Breakfast Of Champions - (Various Asses Remix)

Pauline: I've had difficult conversations with friends who are musicians and artists about this issue. Because a lot of people will pay lip service to the idea of accessibility, but in practise they are not practicing that. I've given the government checklist because there is a checklist available that you can google that you can consult in planning an event to friends who are up and coming artists when they are organising small events. And you can just use that in your planning process to make sure that you've covered enough basis to make an event accessible.

Narration: Making changes to an established venue is a complicated process. Funding must be found, policies developed or updated, and practical aspects like signage and communication must be distributed. We spoke to representatives from the venue management side of the industry to find out more about how this happens.

Music: Cable Ties - Cut Me Down

Sally: Hi I am Sally the music and marketing manager for The Corner Group, which includes Corner Hotel, Northcote Social Club and The National in Richmond.

Rod: Hi I'm Rod, and I'm the General Manager for the Corner Group.

Sally: Basically at the end of last year we underwent a fairly major renovation, it was very focused on our rooftop bar. So the rooftop was here before hand, but there has been changes to the structure of it, the layout of it. Basically just focusing on making better use of the space that we have up here.

Narration: The Corner went about these changes to improve access, but it was not without its challenges.

Rod: The reality is I think when you start moving things around in an older building there's limitations to what you can do, structurally within a realistic budget. I guess the laws and building codes do require a certain level of accessibility, but I guess trying to make these more thoughtful rather than an afterthought there's design challenges there, how to make these spaces usable for people in wheelchairs, not just complying with the building code.

Narration: The Corner added a lift, ramps into the new spaces and converted the old offices and residences. They thought about how patrons would get from point A to point B and realised there was a lot more they could do.

Rod believes that the benefits of changing The Corner to be more accessible are obvious. It meant that loyal patrons could now access spaces as it was originally intended. Rosie, a loyal punter of The Corner, felt a part of the change process as they actually asked her what changes she wanted to see, and when they were realised the reaction was really positive.

Rosie: When the manager approached me to say that they're renovating and what changes they could make to make it more accessible. I was really excited I felt really happy and I felt like I had made I guess a difference and that my going out to advocate for myself had really worked. That was a really fantastic feeling! I never thought that they had noticed. My friend and I, we go to this venue so much. We were absolutely over the moon. I think the first time we went in when it was accessible, we were going up and down the lift and squealing in the lift and getting really excited [laughs].

It's gone from my favourite venue - to my actual favourite venue because it's so easy. And I think a lot of the time when a venue is really, really accessible you don't even think about it. It's like you just go in have a good time and then you leave. You don't even think about everything. Because it's perfect everything's just perfect.

Sally: The whole idea is that meant to be organic and be something that is a long term plan, as opposed to a PR exercise. So obviously being very careful in how we communicate that stuff. The biggest focus is on staff and punter awareness within the venues of what the expectations are but also what is available to them in case they come across any issues and that we are wanting to communicate.

Narration: I asked Rod and Sally what they might say to other venues that are apprehensive about making change and where they might source funding to make it all possible.

Sally: Look I think there's a lot of groups and organisations they just need to talk to. They might be saying "it's too hard" because they don't experience these issues and they don't see how the littlest changes can have the biggest effects.

I think for us, quite early on in this some of the things that have influenced why we have wanted to push for some of these changes was just listening to other people and their experiences.

Music: IV League - Sylvia

Narration: Nikki, from Bandmates.

Nikki: The physical access is always a major concern because a lot of the venues are in old buildings, and a lot of them are also heritage listed. So it becomes very difficult. With something like an accessible toilet. If you can't afford things venues can actually work with their current toilets if they've got the space. When we launched Bandmates Victoria they didn't have an accessible toilet, but they made some modifications to their existing toilet. It's still not what you we'd call an accessible toilet. But it's an ambulant toilet. They put in handrails and they flipped the door around so that you didn't have to pull it, you could just push the door. And they used one of their wider toilets and wheelchair users were able to use that space. You can have something like ramp with a bouncer. So you keep a portable ramp where the bouncer is, so they can pop it out when they need it, and put it away when they don't need it. As long as you have the bathroom facilities to go with it.

Music: Cable Ties - Cut Me Down

Narration: The Corner has received a positive response from punters and the industry and would encourage other venues to follow suit.

Sally: I think it has been overwhelmingly positive. I think the biggest difference that might motivate venues to do something similar is we've had a significant number of groups booking in specifically because we have the accessibility.

Rod: The more we talk about it, the more likely the government is to listen and it might open doors to accessing funding or supplementing works to improve your space. We've seen that happen in other areas within the music industry so I can't see why if we don't if we keep pushing, venues that might not be in a financial position to make positive changes will be able to access some of that funding.

Music: Huntly - Please (Nite Fleit Remix)

Narration: Accessibility is everyone's responsibility - change will happen through artists speaking out through punters changing their behaviour at gigs and through policy. Pauline maintains that policy and legislation still remains important.

Pauline: I do think that if there is legislation, that venues feel more compelled to act. Legislation is one thing and again, enforcement quite another. I don't know how to bridge that gap, other than to constantly put pressure on people making decisions about the creation of these spaces to comply with legislation and to just do the right thing even in the absence of legislation.

Music: Huntly - Please (Nite Fleit Remix),

Sally: I think it is also really important to take into account that Arts venues, organisations or arts in general have always been at the forefront of cultural changes like this and encouraging other industries to follow suit. So not only doing it for the benefit of your own venue but also just to encourage a positive change in general it is important for arts and music organisations to do this, because people look to the arts as leaders. People have their icons, especially in music, and they will be encouraged to listen and follow suit and they might listen to them rather than a government body telling them to do the same thing.

Music: Huntly - Please (Nite Fleit Remix)

Narration: Pauline encourages audiences to speak up against spaces that are not accessible.

Pauline: It really requires people now, punters, people who attend live music, people who love live music scenes, to take an ethical stand and say "this isn't acceptable and if it doesn't change we will withdraw our support from that space." and that's really it. Audiences need to do that and artists need to do that because the venues rely on artists and audiences support artists so if audiences and artists put pressure on venues to comply with legislation I see change happening and gaining momentum.

Rosie: I think social media is huge now and is a great way to get your voice across so I think either tweeting your favourite venue or messaging them, calling up the venue I think if a lot of people are calling up a venue asking if they're accessible - and if they have to say no so many times. They might start to think maybe we should make our venue accessible so that all these people that are calling up could come. I think the big issue is money. Because everyone really wants to be accessible no one really wants to say "No you can't come into my venue because you're disabled and I don't want you here!" I think everyone is willing to let everyone have a great time it's just the ability to.

Wouldn't it be great for everyone to crowd fund venues to become accessible. Everyone put some money in so they can close down for a bit and put in a ramp or something. Wouldn't that be great?

Music: The Hackkets - Speechless

Narration: Where disabilities are perceived as making people different, music is common ground that can bring people together. Andrew, Stuart and Peter, are three members of The Hackkets, a band comprised of members with and without disabilities.

Peter: We came out of Art Life. Art Life's a program for people with disabilities at the Footscray Community Arts Centre. In the early days there was a bit more percussion and it was more a program rather than a band. As time goes on, the maracas left, and the tambourine wasn't played as much and things like that. So time's moved on.

We are the Footscray Community Art Centre house band! So we've played at The Balcony one time and things like that and it was really good -

Stuart: Yeah it really was!

Peter: Yeah you took the microphone off and walked down the stairs and sang up and down the stairs and yeah it was really a hit,

Stuart: I was just being a showman.

Peter: Which you are.

Narration: Specifically allocating funds to access programs is important in sustaining their viability and supporting involvement in live music.

Peter: Department of Health and Human Services, they help fund us. If we don't learn something new during the year - like a new instrument, or improving on an instrument. Our funding will be cut and then we won't have a band to go to. So we get money from the people that hire us out so it's a win-win for everyone. We're happy because we are performing, we are playing to an audience. Don't be scared of us because we have disabilities we can work around that. We can work around your time. We can play for an afternoon, an evening.

Narration: The Hacketts are looking to the future and thinking about how they can make their band and its philosophy sustainable. And if you want to start your own band, The Hacketts have some advice for you.

Peter: I am really excited about our future as a band, because we have so much writing going on it's really good. And our opportunities are going to be so rich.

Andrew: Come out and sing with us, you don't have to be just behind, yeah just whatever.

Stuart: Any teenagers listening who want to form a band and you feel like jamming with us, go ahead! We'd be happy to have you.

Stuart: Had it not been for me playing guitar Hacketts would have gone under.

Peter: There's no I in Team and we are a big team.

Stuart: True. We're not just a big team we are Titanic team.

Peter: Titanic sunk. We're not sinking.

Narration: We asked Pauline, Sally, Elly, Nikki and Rosie - why it's important for everyone to be able to enjoy live music.

Pauline: In a society such as ours our social connections are centred around music and art and sport too if you're into that. So all these cultural and social venues and events are at the

centre of our social lives and connections. So if you shut people out you shut them out of society, that has implications for mental and implications for their physical health of those people and is incredibly damaging and communities. It is a basic human rights issue.

Sally: Live music and going out are very important parts to a lot of people's daily life and there's no reason for one group to be excluded because of physicality or any kind of disability really. You're just making choices of what people are able to do based on something they can't control. So I think it's important to do everything you can to make sure it is equal.

Music: Mallrat - Uninvited

Elly: I think it's so important for everyone to be able to access live music because it's so powerful and because it connects us with people around us and it allows us to express parts of our identity and it allows us to connect with our emotions and that is a really important thing. Why should different groups of people have more barriers for accessing that? We need to be doing everything we can to dismantle the structures that create those barriers and to make music an accessible thing for everyone.

Nikki: It's just about everyone doing what everyone else does. Everybody should have the chance to go and see live music. It helps your mental wellbeing, is one of the big advantages. For me, music is a rite of passage for all of us is a rite of passage. If everyone else is doing it this way. Then why do people with disabilities have to do it differently?

Rosie: When I started to see bands a lot, I never felt disabled, because I was just one of the many fans at a gig singing along, screaming having a great time, jumping around dancing. I never felt like I was judged, I never felt disabled that's why I started going to gigs, I love going to gigs because I still to this day do not feel like I am a disabled person I still I just feel like one of the crowd that's enjoying the band.

Pauline: Most people think of music as just entertainment, but we have to understand, we have to start thinking differently about that. These are spaces where people congregate for community. That is an essential part of being human and mental health and a whole other range of factors. It's essential to who we are. So when you shut out people from those places, you are really - some people call it the oppression of exclusion and I think that's a really good term. I have hope for the future. Just in terms with my conversations particularly younger people there's more of an understanding of ableism as a form of discrimination. There wasn't even when I was a teenager. That's the future we are working towards making sure the world is accessible for everyone.

Thanks for listening to *Sound As Ever* an Australian Music Vault Podcast. This episode was produced by Rebecca Maakasa and Bridget Bourke. Thanks to SYN Media, supporting partner of the Australian Music Vault.

Music: Paul Kelly – Before Too Long

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