The Current State of Live Music in Australia.

Everything artists need to know about touring and festivals in 2027.

For independent and developing artists, the dream of "the tour" remains a rite of passage. It is supposed to be the moment you take your music on the road, connect with your core community, and build an audience territory by territory. But if you have tried to book a local run or get onto a festival lineup recently, you've likely hit an unyielding brick wall. Venues aren't replying, promoters aren't taking risks, and the slots you used to target have vanished.

This isn't an indictment of your music. It is the direct result of a hyper-inflated, fragile live ecosystem. To navigate the current touring landscape, local artists must understand the false economy that was built post-COVID, why it collapsed, and how it has fundamentally altered artist development.

1. The RISE Fund Illusion and the Artist Fee Trap

To understand why the live market is so volatile today, we have to look back at the massive cash injections that flooded the industry immediately after the pandemic.

The Australian Federal Government introduced the RISE Fund, a massive $200 million AUD initiative designed to underwrite the financial risks of staging live events when snap lockdowns and border closures threatened the sector. Alongside this, the $20 million Live Music Australia Scheme and multi-million pound top-ups to industry charity Support Act were deployed to keep grassroots venues open and crew paid.

While this funding was a vital lifeline, it unintentionally created a financial distortion:

- Because promoters had their financial risk heavily subsidised by millions of dollars in government grants, they began booking international headliners and domestic acts at premium, hyper-inflated talent fees.
- When the grant money officially dried up, the expectation of those high fees didn't go away. Agents and international artists continued to demand the same inflated payouts, despite the fact that promoters were now operating on their own dime again.

To support these astronomical artist fees in a self-funded market, festivals and events were forced to aggressively hike their ticket prices.

2. The Consumer Backlash: Overpriced, Copy-Paste Lineups

This fee trap triggered a dangerous domino effect. As ticket prices rose to cover inflated talent costs, cash-strapped consumers simultaneously battling intense cost-of-living pressures, began pulling back.

Worse yet, to guarantee a return on these massive financial outlays, promoters stopped taking risks. They booked the exact same reliable, safe, mid-tier and headline acts over and over again.
The result? Audiences were being asked to pay double the price for the exact same lineups they had seen for the last three years.

The market's reaction was swift and brutal, culminating in a historic contraction of the Australian festival landscape:

- The Revenue Slump**:** According to data from Live Performance Australia's Attendance and Revenue Reports, the industry suffered a 6.7% year-on-year drop in festival revenue, with total attendance sliding down to just over 2 million patrons.
- The Profitability Gap: Creative Australia exposed the harsh reality of modern event promotion, revealing that only 56% of domestic music festivals currently operate at a profit. The remaining 44% are actively losing money or barely breaking even, crushed by skyrocketing insurance premiums, supplier inflation, and late ticket-buying habits.

When iconic institutions like *Splendour in the Grass*, *Groovin the Moo*, *ValleyWays*, and *Coastal Jam* are forced into cancellations or multi-year hiatuses, it leaves a massive gap in the artist development pipeline.

The entry-level festival slots that used to break local talent have completely evaporated.

3. The Catastrophic Loss of Grassroots Infrastructure
The crisis isn't isolated to major festivals.

The local infrastructure that traditionally incubated developing artists, the small bars, pubs, and independent nightclubs is facing a structural collapse.

According to a formal submission by APRA AMCOS to the Australian Parliament, the nation has suffered a catastrophic loss of **1,300 live music venues since 2020**.

The metrics paint a grim picture across all sectors of nightlife:

- The Decline of the Weekly Gig: In Victoria, traditionally the heart of Australia's live scene, the Victorian Live Music Venue Audit tracked a **1**9.4% decline in regular gig presenters (venues hosting at least one live music show per week), plummeting from 813 down to just 655 spaces.

- Regional Disparities: Outside the major capital cities, the damage is severe. Some regional territories have faced up to an 86.2% collapse in regular gig presenters, leaving immense geographic dead zones where local touring is logistically impossible.

- The "Ghost" Venue Reality: While many pubs and bars still hold entertainment licenses on paper, the frequency of live music has cratered. The data shows that 68.3% of listed live music spaces now host less than one gig per month.

- **The Nightclub Crash:** Independent nightclubs are enduring a dual crisis of inflation and a permanent cultural shift, as Gen Z increasingly favours daytime events, wellness, and curated bars over late-night clubbing. Analytics from IBISWorld show that **m**ore than a quarter (26.3%) of all Australian nightclubs have permanently closed, shrinking the market from 482 clubs down to 355. Attendance has almost halved (~50% drop) compared to pre-pandemic baselines.

As independent venues close, the market has rapidly consolidated. Today, an estimated 85% of the remaining Australian live music and late-night market is controlled by just three major entertainment companies.

4. What This Means for Local Artist Development

In a consolidated market controlled by major corporations and struggling independent venues, room for error is zero. Promoters and venue owners can no longer afford to "build" an artist over a three-tour arc. They cannot take a financial risk on an act simply because they have "good music" or a strong aesthetic.

For local artists looking to tour, the rules of engagement have completely changed:

- The In-Built Audience Requirement: Venues and promoters will exclusively work with artists who possess an in-built, verifiable, and growing digital and physical audience within that specific territory.
- Data Over Hype: If you cannot prove via your streaming data, ticket history, and direct-to-fan engagement that you can predictably bring 50 to 100 people through the door in a specific city, you will not get booked.

The false economy of the post-COVID boom is over. The days of relying on subsidised festival slots or empty venue slots to stumble into a fanbase have vanished.

If you are a developing artist today, your primary job isn’t just writing music, it is building an owned audience asset.

Stop relying on algorithmic handouts on social platforms that charge you an ad toll just to reach your own followers. Focus on direct data capture, building direct communication lines with your listeners, and treating your local territory like a hyper-focused, data-driven operation.

The industry has shrunk, but the demand for authentic, community-driven music hasn't. The artists who survive this era will be the ones who stop looking for a shortcut blueprint, accept the reality of the current market, and build an unshakeable foundation from the ground up.