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# **THE MAYOR'S A SQUARE**

## **A Regulatory History of Sydney Rock Venues 1957-1997**

Shane Homan BA (Hons) UWS, Nepean

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School of English, Linguistics and Media  
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## Summary

In 1957 Australian audiences witnessed the first live rock and roll performances in Sydney town halls and hotels. This thesis adopts the city of Sydney as a case study in examining the development of live rock/pop performance in Australia, with particular emphasis on the industrial-legal structures framing its production and consumption.

The thesis begins by identifying two related contexts which have impacted on venue governance: the social construction of live performance venues paralleled by understandings of the performer and fan as 'unruly' subject by media, government and the music scene itself; and the commercial development of live music. Further, a third context can be identified in the competing discourses between these broader themes, in which the state's desire for manageable citizens remains in conflict with historic notions of the rock and roll subject. The project draws upon the history of subcultural theory in re-assessing notions of the bohemian/deviant subject. The creation of 'moral panics' in the formation of rock and roll as societal threat is similarly identified in governmental procedures and social control strategies. These aspects are assessed within changing notions defining 'uncontrollable youth' and youth leisure governance.

Three broad stages of development are posited in the history of live rock in Sydney: the appropriation of formal civic spaces (the town hall and ballroom) as initial sites of public performance in the 1950s; a subsequent period of consolidation in the 1960s, during which modifications to stage practices ensured rock's place in registered clubs; and the profitable 'Oz Rock' period (1978-1988), when the New South Wales hotel circuit benefited from the expansion of performance sites in radio and television. A final era of change is documented in the decline of the live pub scene, with an accompanying shift to dance musics as the primary concern of popular music regulation in the 1990s.

The project incorporates interviews with rock musicians who have performed in Sydney to describe venue conditions and stage practices, and uses local, State and Federal government archives to document and assess legislative change. The nature of liquor, building and noise laws, and other legislation relating to venue governance are considered as an alternative means of analysing the extents to which live performance opportunities have been constructed or diminished.

The centrality of live performance to national popular music industry mythologies, embodied in the 'Oz Rock' tradition, is explored within the contemporary decline in live performance venues. Because of the conflicts in the historical construction of the rock subject identified above, the social and legal factors involved in the establishment of music venues presents continual challenges to Sydney venues. It is argued that the presence of live rock and roll within the city remains a matter of negotiation. This thesis provides a re-assessment of how policy environments inform live performance opportunities, to argue for a broader understanding of the nexus between culture and administration.

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