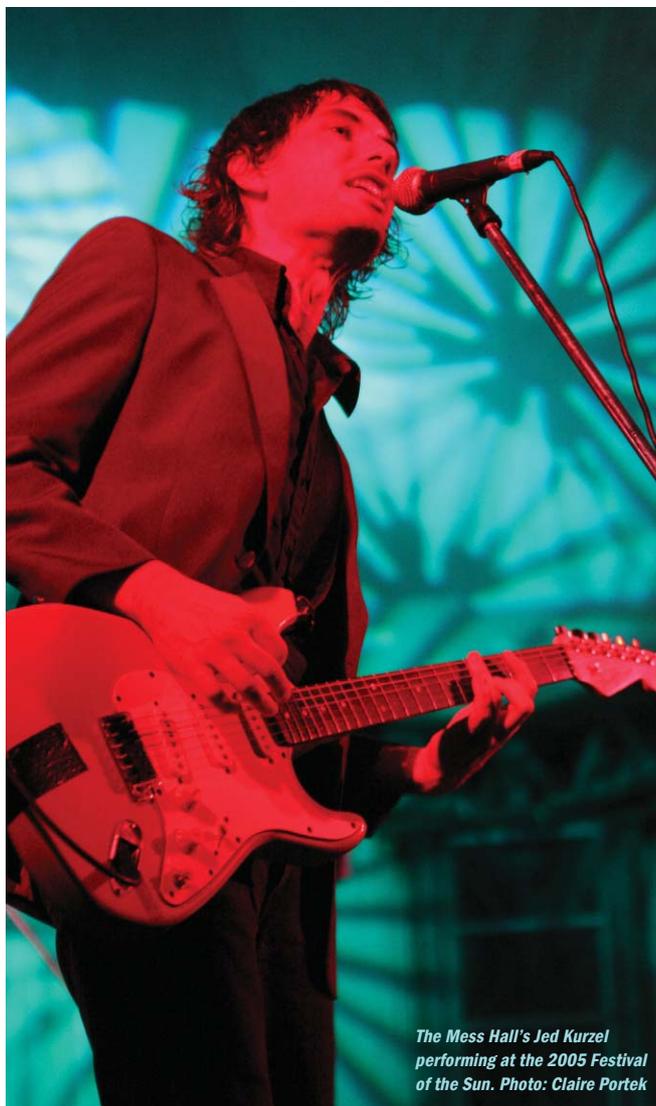


Saving the Scene

The MusicNSW youth music program, Indent, undertook an epic tour of regional NSW in August to assess the state of the live music scene for young people. This is what they found ...

by GREG CAREY



The Mess Hall's Jed Kurzel performing at the 2005 Festival of the Sun. Photo: Claire Portek

Clocking up 4,000 kms and stretching to over 11 locations across the state, the Save The Scene Tour was an event management and music industry workshop odyssey. Over 4 weeks we tapped the expertise of 21 music industry professionals and held 33 workshop sessions with around 250 young event promoters and musicians. We also held a series of roundtable discussions with key regional industry personnel – promoters and event managers, booking agents, staff from councils and conservatoriums, Regional Arts Development Officers and musicians. One of our aims was to discover exactly how healthy the music scene is in regional NSW ... and what can be done to support and nurture it. The answer? Well, it's still a very long way to the top if you want to rock'n'roll in regional NSW but there are a few things we can do to help make it an easier ride.

Indent is a major youth music development success story. The backbone is an annual grants program — the Indent Partnership Grants — that distributes \$110,000 to young people to create their own drug & alcohol free entertainment. Since it began 7 years ago, the program has supported 44 Indent event teams who have collectively staged over 100 events supporting 150 emerging bands, each with an average audience of 20,000+ young people per year. The program has developed a significant platform for young people to engage and experience live music in the all ages arena. What became apparent during the Save the Scene tour, however, is that further support is needed to make an real impact on the development of a thriving contemporary music scene for young people in regional NSW.

The biggest issue is the lack of venues for all-ages gigs. Licensed venues won't run them because they don't produce enough revenue through bar sales. For young musicians with no alternative ways to cut their teeth, this is a significant shortfall. We discovered one local North Coast band which had resorted to holding gigs in their parents' lounge room because there simply is nowhere else for them to perform. On a positive note, though, over the last couple of years

December

7 December

 *Move 2 Groove*
Murray Conservatorium Stage Band. Free performance at Woodland Grove,
WODONGA Tel 02 60 414249

7 December

 *The Roots Roadshow: Carus & the True Believers, Loren & the Grow Your Owns, Rob Sawyer.* Three of Australia's most acclaimed live acts joining forces for a musical tour de force. Soden's Australia Hotel,
ALBURY Tel 1300 762545

7 December

 *In The Bin* touring finale
Giving regional and rural Australia the chance to experience excellent short films. Featuring 14 of Australia's best short films plus 16 locally made shorts. **WOMBEGAN CAVES** Tel 02 4823 4407

7 December — 19 January

 *Threaded Connections* A large artwork and installation is being made which aims to explore women's connections to their heritage, their cultural backgrounds, the natural environment and history. **LISMORE** Regional Gallery 02 6622 2209

PCYCs have begun opening their doors to include music and events and are packing in audiences of 250-400 people in towns where the venues exist. But is not just all-ages gigs that are affected by the scarcity of venues. At our round table discussions many local musicians commented on the need to increase the number of supported live music venues in NSW, especially on the far South Coast. The solution we see is to encourage venues by providing education about how to maximise revenue through live music and how to build and sustain a healthy local music scene.

Transportation is another pressing issue. For young people wanting to attend gigs in regional NSW it can be quite difficult to access, let alone afford, transport — both within and outside their towns. The privatisation of bus companies has made it near impossible for young people to afford expensive bus tickets on top of a concert ticket; and the newly introduced curfew laws have made it difficult for young people to drive to gigs, with the result that many are missing out on shows altogether. Transportation is new territory to collectively explore — but it is an important one to resolve.

The other is audience development. It has been great to see the emergence over the last few years of regional all-ages festivals such as Groovin The Moo in Maitland and Albury, Dusty Days in Wagga Wagga and Festival Of The Sun in Port Macquarie which have created opportunities for regional and rural NSW audiences to develop as well as giving exposure to artists on tour beyond the capital cities. Bands that generally appeal to all ages audiences are busting to reach regional areas. But there are many financial risks with the overheads of travel, petrol and accommodation. One solution may be for regional towns to collaborate and work collectively to bring bands out — creating touring circuits so groups can afford to come out more regularly; also asking local businesses to put up bands or get in on supporting the events.

The good news is that such collaborations are starting to occur through the Indent network. The Rock Up collective involves Indent committees from the Central West towns of Orange, Bathurst, Dubbo and Lithgow working together to create their own touring circuits so they can afford to bring out bands — a joint venture which seems to be working a treat. Not only are the artists gaining wider exposure (without monetary risks), but audiences are starting to swell.

It is evident that young people — and people generally — in regional areas are seeking local live music experiences, whether they are punters, young bands or emerging promoters. Our experience shows that where there are venues; TAFEs or other educational institutions; community radio stations and other peripheral music industry infrastructure, communities are achieving results. People actively working to create a culture of live, contemporary music seems to be the common denominator in towns with a sustainable music scene.

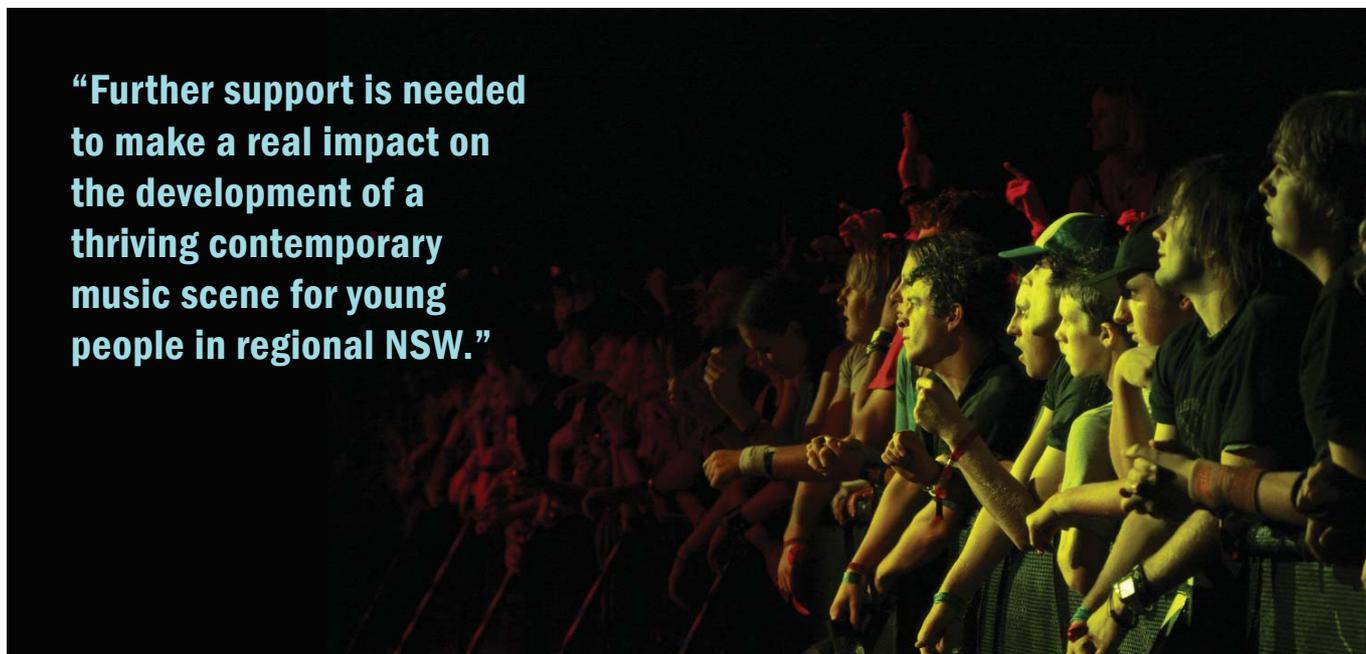
So if you don't have a live music scene in your community, get proactive! Start supporting local and touring artists, organise a street team to stick up posters for your favourite bands; start your own radio show promoting music that you love; organise your own gigs, volunteer on events; let your local MP know about what you are doing — and contact us here at MusicNSW. We'd love to know how you are saving the scene! ■

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Full roundtable report and discussion forum on the VROOM website www.vroom.musicnsw.com

Find out more about the other MusicNSW programs, including VROOM, the Whichway contemporary Aboriginal music development program, NSW music export marketing and more at www.musicnsw.com.

“Further support is needed to make a real impact on the development of a thriving contemporary music scene for young people in regional NSW.”



December

8 December — 12 January

👁️ *Synergy* Margaret Dimoff's painting presents us with a celebration of evocative imagery and just recognisable forms; from the landscapes of the far south NSW coast.

BEGA Valley Regional Gallery
Tel 02 6499 2187

8 December — 27 January

👁️ *Bitumen: by Heydy Martinez* An exhibition examining ‘...the everyday little things that hold inspiring marks ... dark illusions.’ Western Plains Cultural Centre,

DUBBO Tel 02 6801 4444

9 December

🎭 *The Dora Fay Davenport Show: How to Achieve Domestic Bliss* This ‘lifestyle’ show takes its audience back to the 1950’s with Dora, a fictitious celebrity. Western Plains Cultural Centre, **DUBBO** Tel 02 6801 4444

9 December

🎵 *A Day on the Green* Lionel Richie (USA), and Marcia Hines. Spend a warm summer’s day the soulful Richie and Hines at Centennial Vineyards, **BOWRAL** Tel 136100