ROCK, THIS CITY:
A Thematic History of Live
Popular Music in Licensed Venues in Newcastle,
Australia, During the Oz/Pub Rock Era
(1970s and 80s)

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Declarations

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. ** Unless an Embargo has been approved for a determined period.

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Gaye Sheather: ___________________________
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Dedication

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Abstract

This study investigates the development of 'mainstream' popular music in one Australian city, that of Newcastle, NSW, in the period 1973-1988. This period became known more generally as the Oz/Pub Rock era and coincides approximately with the period the national music programme *Countdown* was televised (1974 - 1987).

In 1973, there were approximately seventeen (17) local bands that could be identified as performing mainstream music styles in licensed music venues in Newcastle. By 1987, the total number performing in licensed venues, performing in mainstream and/or alternative music styles numbered approximately one hundred and forty-eight (148). A total of one hundred and sixty-one (161) licensed venues were identified as existing across the study period. During this period the greater Newcastle area had a large population of young people who were then eligible to participate in live music in licensed venues. The unique way in which Newcastle suburbs originally emerged historically in Newcastle played a significant role in patterns of participation in these live music venues. Moreover, the large number of suburbs contained within the two LGAs of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie meant that the increasing number of younger patrons had a large number of licensed venues from which to choose and many initially attended live performance in venues close to the home suburbs with which they identified.

It is argued here that the formation of a musical identity is strongly connected to a local *habitus*, which includes the cultivation of social, symbolic, economic and cultural capital, which are built up over time. These connected musicians with audiences and venues in Newcastle. Given Newcastle’s proximity to Sydney and the attempt by local bands to achieve success there, it was found that these accumulated capitals were not easily transferrable to other areas. What Newcastle came to offer local musicians, as a result, was the ability to recognise and use to its full
extent, the social, symbolic and cultural capital available to them in their home town. This situation raises questions about the nature of authenticity as a construct in the performance of 'mainstream' music. While authenticity is constructed relative to the time and space in which it is experienced, at the same time a number of existing myths about mainstream music being performed in Newcastle at the time have been found to not have been borne out in this study.

The study concludes that the structural conditions that were peculiar to Newcastle and the way the various actors performed their roles within those conditions contributed to the way popular music developed in local spaces in Newcastle.