

THE CASE FOR REVIVING THE ROXY

Context

Parramatta is a prominent suburb in Sydney's sprawling western suburbs and was founded in 1788, the same year as the settlement at Sydney Cove. The city is the oldest inland European settlement in Australia and contains many historic buildings significant to Australia's European heritage. As a major business and commercial centre and transport hub, Parramatta has more recently undergone a transition that has brought significant residential development to the city centre and adjoining areas.

The Department of Planning and Environment's *Plan for Growing Sydney* released in December 2014 stated that:

"Through urban renewal programs, existing neighbourhoods will flourish with better access to public transport links and local community facilities, shops, cinemas, cafes, and health and education services.

Our city's important heritage areas will be protected and celebrated, and arts and culture will help build vibrant communities, with a focus on both the Sydney CBD and Parramatta."

Additionally, print media coverage at the time of the Plan's release quoted developments in Parramatta as providing *"world-class shopping and entertainment"*.

It is imperative that Parramatta retains its heritage buildings and develops a strong community culture as it doubles its population. Of the many kinds of cultural endeavours, drama is perhaps the most immediately involved in the life of its community with the theatre symbolising drama's place in the culture at large. Providing a live venue in the heart of Parramatta enhances the area's local community and helps to build a "vibrant" community.

Access to live theatre for the Parramatta community is limited to the present Riverside Theatres in Parramatta (761 seats) with additional theatre experiences only available in Sydney city (23 kilometres) and the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in Penrith (35 kilometres). Having a major live 1,500 seat lyric theatre in Parramatta, in addition to the present Riverside Theatres, is an essential part of the city's culture, arts and entertainment.

Development on the Roxy Theatre site

The Roxy Theatre in Parramatta is a striking example of the Spanish Mission style theatre - richly decorated, its original layout includes stuccoed walls, arches, false balconies, a "Spanish" style ceiling of panelled and painted timber and a central dome in the main auditorium. The theatre was opened on 6 February 1930. Originally it had 1,923 seats and though it was opened with the Talkies it had a Christie theatre organ which was reputedly one of the largest and finest in the state. The Roxy Theatre is listed on Parramatta's Local Environmental Plan, the National Trust Register and the Register of the National Estate.

The City of Parramatta Council has received a development application (DA) from the owner of the heritage-listed Roxy Theatre to develop the site with the intention to retain only the former dress circle of the theatre and to build a commercial tower block above. This development will reduce the theatre's original performance potential substantially and impact on the iconic building by destroying its presentation to the street.

With thousands of people expected to move into the many apartments being built in the city over the coming years, the revival of a grand Roxy as a 1,500-seat lyric theatre is an opportunity to provide a memorable experience to theatre goers. This revival is in keeping with the Department of Planning and Environment's ***Plan for Growing Sydney*** (2014) to would ensure that *"important heritage areas will be protected and celebrated, and arts and culture will help build vibrant communities"*.

This is a once only opportunity to protect and celebrate this iconic heritage listed building and revive it as a major live performance venue capable of housing world class blockbuster live performances.

Help make this happen by supporting the Revive the Roxy cause.

Cheryl Bates

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