

The Hon. Don Harwin, MLC  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Thank you for your time on the occasion of our meeting in relation to Parramatta's Roxy Theatre. It was gratifying to hear of your in-principle support of the Roxy's revival as a world-class live venue.

Since this time we have carried out further research into the wider context surrounding Parramatta's cultural offerings, and how the Roxy might fit in.

Everything we have observed has only heightened our conviction that the Roxy's re-instatement as a prestige live theatre is by far the best and most appropriate option not just for the building and for Parramatta's heritage, but for the amenity and quality of life for the citizenry of Parramatta.

Our conviction is based on the following observations:-

#### **CIVIC LINK**

The Roxy is at the very heart of the proposed Civic Link, in fact all the verbal and pictorial descriptions contained in Parramatta Council's Civic Link Framework Plan position the Roxy as the very centrepiece of what will be the civic heart of Parramatta. It will occupy a similar relative position to Parramatta as does the Sydney Town Hall to Sydney – minus the traffic.

As Church Street will become a thoroughfare for cars and public transport, the restaurants and al fresco cafes currently located there will move to the Civic Link and line this pedestrian precinct that connects Parramatta Station straight past the Roxy to the Powerhouse Museum by the river.

What must occur inside the Roxy to enhance and complement this environment? If it returns to its more recent use as a nightclub, it will also return to the attendant social problems that ultimately resulted in its closure as a nightclub.

If it reignites as a live theatre, there will be 1500 happy (and sober) patrons pouring out into the Civic heart of Parramatta, having just attended a blockbuster musical, a cultural event, an orchestral concert, or an opera or ballet, looking for somewhere to have a meal or a nightcap.

During the day, the wonderful courtyard of the Roxy will merge seamlessly into the open civic square where the Parramatta business community will be converging in vast numbers looking for lunch in an attractive oasis. We cannot imagine a better or more civilised utilisation for this imposing heritage building which frankly, is not going to go away, and can't possibly continue in its present derelict state given the high aspirations for the success of the Civic Link.

#### **RIVERSIDE THEATRES**

Regardless of the outcome of the Roxy, we have concerns about the ongoing success of the Riverside Theatres if the concept of a 1500 seat theatre is realised as part of its future development.

Riverside is an outstandingly successful Community theatre complex, due almost entirely to the vision and determination of Robert Love.

Community theatres are just that: they exist for the community and as such need to have the flexibility and diversity to accommodate all manner of performances, presentations and events in a variety of smaller venues, many of them attracting smaller numbers and running for a single night.

If Riverside's principal venue is intended to host long-running commercial musicals, as has been stated, this is going to rule that venue out as a community facility.

It must be remembered that community theatres are not just for audiences; they are just as much about amateur or semi-professional individuals or groups who want an opportunity to perform on stage. Whereas performers, mostly amateurs, have the opportunity to enjoy two weeks of performances in a 700 seat venue, economics will dictate that these performance opportunities will reduce to less than half in a 1500 seat venue. This is not community theatre.

There are many other users of the Riverside Theatre, who may only have an attendance of 200 or less. While this occupancy would be manageable in a 700 or even 900 seat venue, it would be more than discouraging in a 1500 seat venue, not to mention financially untenable given the costs associated with a much larger venue.

These considerations place the Riverside model in danger of losing its “mojo” so painstakingly and successfully achieved over a long period of time.

#### **Location of Riverside vs Roxy**

We believe that there is nothing better than a live theatre to invigorate and enrich the heart of a city. Given the location of Riverside on the other side of the Parramatta River and therefore physically remote from the centre of the Parramatta CBD, The Roxy is perfectly placed to be Parramatta’s Civic Theatre, to set the tone for the entire Civic Link, and to interact with the local café industry to their mutual benefit.

#### **Where the Roxy fits in**

A more conservative approach to the Riverside Theatre, of about 1000 seats, along with a commitment to the Roxy as Parramatta’s commercial lyric theatre, will allow the approach to both venues to be taken with complete integrity and remove any suggestion of compromise in identity. The result would be a perfect suite of theatre spaces for the city, and one can only imagine an enormous vote of approval from the Parramatta community.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Roxy Action Committee recommends that Local and State governments work together to offer strong incentives to the current owner of the Roxy Theatre, to give this historic gem back to the community, and to then fully restore and develop the venue to take its rightful place as the City of Parramatta’s Commercial Lyric Theatre and place of Civic Assembly. We believe in the utter correctness of this course, and that any other outcome is frankly unthinkable, given the low-rent benefit of any of the alternatives.

We look forward to having the opportunity to discuss further with you the best outcome for the Roxy and for Parramatta.

Robert Fox  
President, The Roxy Lyric Theatre Action Group