

NEW SYDNEY VENUE... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

Willowbank, near Ipswich in Queensland, with sets from Brantley Gilbert, Kip Moore, Tyler Farr, Kelsea Ballerini, Chase Rice and a slew of other local, U.S. and Canadian acts.

“Queensland is the heart of country music in this country and this year we sold out a

February — had its biggest year ever, a sign that smaller, more boutique-like festivals may be the wave of the future for the region.

It was a solid end-of-year for Chugg as well, with sold-out dates from Hozier in October, impressive arena shows from an act he’s helped grow in the market, Florence + the

Machine, and smash arena gigs from Robbie Williams and Elton John.

Like Chugg, Gudinski said the festival business is changing and a bit damaged as a result of the meltdown of EDM promoter SFX Entertainment and Maddah’s disastrous Sonisphere 2015 cancellation.

“People are really embracing the destination festival over traveling ones,” he said, pointing out the best year ever for the A Day on the Green concert series — which he co-promotes with Mick and Anthea Newton of Roundhouse Entertainment. The event now has 14 exclusively contracted wineries ranging from 7,000 to 18,000 in every state in Australia and this November they will mark their 400th winery show under the A Day on the Green banner.

Also like Chugg, Gudinski is keeping his powder dry when it comes to the new venue in Sydney Harbor. “There’s a new [60,000-capacity] stadium being built in Perth that will be a great addition to that city, but there’s a note of frustration for a lot of promoters about the Sydney Entertainment Centre being pulled down,” he said.

“That’s forcing a lot of acts to go to the smaller theater, which they’re not that excited about. It will be hard to get into that building with 25 percent less capacity making a real gap in the market.” Gudinski said the New Zealand market is as buoyant as he’s ever seen it, though, with massive shows by Bruce Springsteen, the Eagles, Rolling Stones and Fleetwood Mac doing record numbers.

The soft economy, however, continues to be a concern as well. “With the dollar the way it is, the market is a bit slow and some artists are realizing they can’t come here early in their careers,” he said. “They might have to wait until they are more established and not come to the market too often. They need to leave two or three years between tours.”

As for the future, Gudinski is looking to develop a festival at the Hanging Rock site in Victoria and, like his peers, is hoping to hear news that Adele might be looking at playing her first-ever Australian/New Zealand gigs. “That will be something enormous here,” he said of the potential arena/stadium shows by the acclaimed British singer. 

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Based on concert and event grosses from Feb. 1, 2015 – Jan. 31, 2016, as reported to *Venues Today*.

VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
1. Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne	16,310	\$36,461,848	336,519	33
2. Allphones Arena, Sydney	20,997	\$34,581,252	517,844	64
3. Perth Arena	14,996	\$27,709,677	339,682	103
4. Brisbane Entertainment Centre	13,500	\$26,859,875	285,019	45
5. Qantas Credit Union Arena, Sydney*	12,500	\$20,765,166	267,197	44

*Arena demolished to make way for ICC Sydney

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month in advance,” said Chugg. “It’s just a magnificent parkland outside a car racing track with beautiful green lawns.” Chugg said more than 5,000 people camped out for the weekend event, which was preceded by the CMC Music Awards in Brisbane.

Both events are achieved in close collaboration with partner Rob Potts of Rob Potts Entertainment Edge. “He’s on the Country Music Association board in the U.S. and he spends a lot of time in Nashville... his contacts in that area are key in our ability to put on these great shows,” said Chugg. CMC is a big undertaking, with the Chugg team building out the entire site from scratch. “It’s totally profitable and in this age, where a lot of festivals are struggling, it’s great to have the biggest one ever in this climate.”

The great news on CMC came as others in the festival biz are struggling. After more than 20 years, the long-running Big Day Out Festival flamed out in 2014 after what Chugg said was a result of a splintered market. “Big Day Out had indie, punk, EDM, mainstream rock, but then the EDM festivals started up and they took that focus and then [former BDO co-promoter] AJ [Maddah] started Soundwave and took the punk and rock away and we started Laneway and that took the indie away,” he said, noting that well-publicized missteps by Maddah “took some of the confidence out of the [festival] market.”

That said, Chugg boasted that his Laneway event — which hit Singapore, Auckland, Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Fremantle in January and

Machine, and smash arena gigs from Robbie Williams and Elton John.

As for the new venue in downtown Sydney, Chugg said he’s withholding judgment for now. “I was disappointed that they pulled the Sydney Entertainment Centre down,” he said. “I can’t really see the common sense in building a smaller venue — it’s tough enough to make it work with 10,000 and now you’re talking 8,000 or 9,000. A lot of acts don’t like playing [21,000-capacity] Allphones [Arena] because it’s a long way out there to the Olympic precinct with a one-way rail system and a long, hard drive in peak traffic.”

There are other venues he’s excited about, including Melbourne’s Margaret Court Arena, a 5,000-seater he’s been booking more often and which is emerging as an important venue, along with Melbourne’s Myer Music Bowl, where he put on a 10,000 ticket sold-out Tame Impala show in November.

As for what the future holds, Chugg said the Americana genre is starting to make inroads in the country and he suspects that will follow country as the next growth market.

Michael Gudinski, founder, The Mushroom Group
In a word, Gudinski said the past year has been “miraculous,” one of the best in his 40-plus years in the business. Taylor Swift became the first artist to do back-to-back stadium tours and play three shows at Melbourne’s AAMI Stadium (to a total of 96,000), with her 76,000-capacity Sydney show at ANZ Stadium, the biggest of her world tour, filmed by Apple.

“Ed Sheeran did great business, too, and