A great place to start your walk around Melbourne’s music highlights is underneath the soaring white spire of the Arts Centre Melbourne. This building houses the State Theatre, the Playhouse Theatre and the Fairfax Studio. The Australian Music Vault, also housed in the Arts Centre, is a celebration of the Australian contemporary music story – past, present and future. It’s a place to explore and discover Australia’s music scene, featuring a free, immersive exhibition showcasing Australian music, innovative digital participatory experiences and iconic objects from our Australian Performing Arts Collection.

Head towards the Yarra River. The round building on your left is Hamer Hall, which hosts a broad range of local and international concerts from rock, pop and jazz through to classical and chamber music. As you cross the river, on your right you’ll pass Birrarung Marr, a public space which is a significant site for Aboriginal artists and communities. Feel free to explore the area, where you will also find the Federation Bells, a set of 39 bronze bells, which were created as part of celebrations for the centenary of Australia’s 1901 federation. You can compose music for the Federation Bells using its online composer.

Continue past Flinders Street Station and turn right along Flinders Street, towards Russell Street. The Forum, on the corner of Flinders Street and Russell Street, was originally built in 1929 as a grand picture palace with a multi-coloured, star-lit ceiling and plaster reproductions of Greco-Roman statues. After a time as a Christian revival centre (during which the statues were discreetly clothed), it was redesigned as a music venue. The Forum’s sloping floor and a plush seated area at the back make it one of the best places in Australia to see live music, regardless of where you’re seated. Motorhead, Nick Cave, The Drones, Paul Kelly, Archie Roach, The Church, The Saints, Sonic Youth, Beck, The Beastie Boys, Gillian Welch and countless others have performed here.

Turn left up Russell Street and right at Flinders Lane. The third narrow street on your right is AC/DC Lane, the first street in Australia named after a rock band. Street-naming rules don’t permit the use of a forward-slash, so diehard fans used to graffití one in themselves. As a result, City of Melbourne retrofitted the giant lightning bolt you see today as a permanent solution to honour the band. Fittingly, the lane has become the home of the iconic Cherry Bar. Cherry operates as a live music venue every night of the year. Its late-night license also makes it a favourite hangout for local and international musicians after their shows; just ask Lady Gaga, who famously danced on the bar!

Keep walking along Flinders Lane, turn left at Exhibition Street and right onto Little Collins Street. All of Melbourne’s “little” streets have existed since the city “Hoddle” grid was laid out in 1837. From these little streets sprouted Melbourne’s famous laneways. On the left you will pass Boney, which has become something of an institution in Melbourne due to its seven day, late-night programming of live music and DJs. Turn left at Meyers Place, and on your left you will find Loop Project Space & Bar. Drop into this venue any time after 4pm and you’re bound to be mesmerised by its ever-changing program of live audio-visual performances and workshops.

Turn right on Bourke Street and walk uphill towards Parliament House. Support for the musical heritage of Melbourne is increasing as the gentrification of the dusty corners of the city rolls on and venues close down.
In early 2010, the Save Live Australia’s Music (SLAM) rally finished with an impromptu concert on the steps of Parliament House. SLAM was the biggest cultural rally in Australia’s history. 20,000 people marched to protest rules and regulations that were forcing the closure of inner-city music venues.

Turn left at Spring Street and walk to the Princess Theatre. This site has been used for entertainment since 1854, and is still in operation today. In 1951, an Aboriginal ‘Moomba’ show was held at the Princess featuring Georgia Lee, Harold Blair, Allan and Joan Saunders, Joyce Johnson and other Aboriginal performers. Moomba has since evolved into Australia’s largest community festival, drawing over one million people and is held every year over the Labour Day long-weekend in March, featuring a diverse program of musical and cultural activities.

Turn left at Little Bourke Street. Just behind the Princess Theatre is Amphlett Lane. Chrissy Amphlett was the charismatic singer for the Divinyls but sadly died of breast cancer in 2013. A petition by her friends, family and fans, supported by City of Melbourne, resulted in the naming of the lane in early 2015. Later that year it was baptised by an all-Australian Chrissy Amphlett tribute concert held as part of Melbourne Music Week, an annual event held in November dedicated to celebrating and supporting Melbourne’s music industry.

Turn right off Exhibition Street where you can check out the season’s offering at Her Majesty’s Theatre on your left and the Comedy Theatre on your right. Turn left into Little Lonsdale Street, keep walking until you get to Swanston Street and turn left. AC/DC’s film-clips for “It’s A Long Way To The Top” (1976) was filmed along Swanston Street, from the corner of Bourke Street down past the corner of Collins Street. Whilst much has changed along this stretch of Swanston Street, landmarks such as the Melbourne Town Hall and the Manchester Unity building are easily recognisable. The “vertical laneway” known as Curtin House includes a number of bars and restaurants along with The Toff in Town. The Toff is a small, intimate performance space that has featured artists such as Ed Kuepper, Bill Callaghan, Pete Murray, Paul Kelly, Martha Wainwright, Tony Joe White, Holly Throsby, Rowland S. Howard and Robert Forster.

Bourke Street Mall is a popular spot for some of our local music talent busking on the street, and is where some of Melbourne’s musicians started their careers, including The Pierce Brothers and Tash Sultana.

On the corner of Swanston and Collins streets is the grand Melbourne Town Hall. In June 1964, on the portico above the entrance, The Beatles were welcomed to Melbourne by the Lord Mayor, Edward Curtis. The city was brought to a standstill as 100,000 people clambered for a look at the Fab Four. In 1968, a similar number gathered to welcome Aboriginal boxer Lionel Rose after he won the world bantamweight boxing title in Japan. Amongst his many accomplishments, Lionel also recorded a few hit country records. In 1977, ABBA was also welcomed to Melbourne on the iconic portico.

Melbourne Town Hall has often been used as a venue for large overseas and local acts. Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs’ 1971 album “Live” was recorded here. It hosts the largest grand organ in the Southern Hemisphere, which is often utilised by the contemporary bands performing here. Learn more about the grand organ, as well as the architectural, social and political significance of this impressive building on a free one hour tour, every weekday at 11am and 1pm from Town Hall concierge desk (bookings essential, call 9658 9658).

Opposite the Melbourne Town Hall, is another iconic venue – Max Watt’s at 125 Swanston Street. Australian artists such as Paul Kelly, Powderfinger, Hunters & Collectors, Birds of Tokyo, Hoodoo Gurus and You Am I have filled the room along with international artists including the New York Dolls, Muse, Foo Fighters, No Doubt and The Strokes. The venues you have encountered on this tour are but a fraction of Melbourne’s immense music scene. We hope you feel inspired to catch a show or visit one of Melbourne’s many music stores.

View Melbourne’s full gig guide on the Melbourne Music City App musicvictoria.com.au/melbourne_music_city_app

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Other significant sites

Festival Hall, West Melbourne
In the early 1960s, the Stadium, a boxing and wrestling venue, was redesigned to allow for music concerts and renamed Festival Hall. For many years it has hosted some of the biggest acts to come to Melbourne.

Sidney Myer Music Bowl, Kings Domain
Surrounded by parklands, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl opened in 1959. 2,000 people can be seated and a further 10,000 can comfortably sit on the grass. Philharmonic orchestras, heavy metal bands, Christmas carollers and House DJs – the Myer Music Bowl caters for all tastes.

Melbourne Recital Centre
Melbourne Recital Centre is an acclaimed music destination combining architectural innovation and acoustic perfection within its two world-class performance spaces to showcase the best music, artists and ensembles from around the world.

Melbourne in music clips
Melbourne has featured in many music clips over the years including:

AC/DC
It’s A Long Way To The Top (1975)

Skyhooks
This Is My City (1976)

John Paul Young
Yesterday’s Hero (1975)

The Mixtures
The Pushbike Song (1970)

Elvis Costello
I Wanna Be Loved (1984)

The Meanies
It’s A Long Way To The Top (1995)

The Cat Empire
Stel The Light (2013)

Courtney Barnett
Elevator Operator (2016)

Record stores
Basement Discs
Heartland Records
JB Hi-Fi
Missing Link/Record Collectors Corner
Off The Hip
Rocksteady Records
Wax Museum

For a list of music businesses and venues in Melbourne, visit whatson.melbourne.vic.gov.au