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VCAM staff say uni merger was the day the music died

UNIVERSITY of Melbourne's music faculty is in danger of becoming a cultural "morgue" after it merged with the Victorian College of the Arts, becoming VCAM, last year, a 30-year teaching veteran believes.

Enrolments at Monash University's school of music have surged by 44 per cent, with VCAM staff reporting plummeting student numbers and morale.

John Griffiths said the effects of the VCAM merger on the music program had been dire.

"The net effect is that the once vibrant Parkville conservatorium now has the chill of the morgue," Professor Griffiths said. "I believe there is no good reason for the faculty of music at University of Melbourne [Parkville] and VCA to have amalgamated. VCA should be and deserves to be an independent institution... This can only be resolved by sensible government policy."

Lobby group Save VCA says students are suffering, with two orchestras – which used to be based across two campuses – being rolled into one.

Another VCAM music teacher said the options for her students had halved. "I've been deeply concerned about the low morale of students ... and their reduced options. Their options have been halved, really."

Save VCA says last year the Southbank campus staged six public performances, and VCA composers had 15 hours of rehearsal with an orchestra before their piece was performed in public and recorded.

This year, the entire VCAM is staging four performances, and composers will have just one one-hour "read through" of their piece with no public performance.

University spokesman John Du Bois said most of these matters were reported to Ziggy Switkowski during his recent independent review of VCAM. "Of course [the issues] are of concern to the university and will be addressed in its response."

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