

3 groundwork

winter 2006

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the arts and disaster recovery

Most of you will remember exactly where you were when you heard about the devastating tsunami on Boxing Day in 2004, and you might also remember that sense of disbelief as the incomprehensible numbers of deaths kept growing. You may have struggled to imagine what the loss of 300,000 lives on Sumatra, an island twice the size of Victoria, actually meant. Perhaps you wondered how, without any medical or other useful training, you might be of any possible assistance to the millions who were now displaced, without a home, community or any means of supporting themselves.

On Saturday 27 May, more than 6,000 lost their lives when an earthquake struck the ancient royal city of Yogyakarta on the densely populated island of Java, Indonesia. 200,000 are now homeless and many more have lost their livelihoods. While the immediate humanitarian response is expected to last several months, rebuilding will take years.

Yogyakarta will be familiar to a great many Australians. It is widely regarded as the cultural



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centre of Indonesia, with the famous Borobudur and Prambanan temples nearby and it is home to a number of Universities including Gadjah Mada which runs an active guest lecturer program that has hosted many eminent Australian academics. The city is also home to many small arts organisations such as galleries, studios, theatres, dance groups and traditional craft and music groups. These small organisations play an important role within their villages, as meeting places and places where local community performances can take place. Early reports indicate that a large number of these organisations have had their facilities, including offices, libraries, equipment and rehearsal/performance spaces, completely destroyed.

Given the impact of this tragedy on the community and social fabric of this important cultural centre of our nearest neighbour, RAV is offering to assist Victorian cultural organisations who would like to put in contact with similar cultural organisations in the affected area with the view to assisting in the rebuilding process. If you,

your organisation or your community would like to know more, email enquiry@rav.net.au.

opening ceremony, commonwealth games

As reported in the last issue of groundwork, RAV spent much of 2005 working with traditional Indigenous language groups across Victoria in the creation of up to 37 possum skin cloaks, the largest contemporary collection ever produced. In March 2006, RAV co-ordinated bringing Elders from each of the participating groups to Melbourne, with carers, to rehearse and later participate in the Opening Ceremony of the Games at the MCG. RAV staff who were involved in supporting this part of the project were all very moved to have been part of the excitement and the euphoria that was clearly visible on the faces of the Elders as they proudly showed their living culture to the world.

RAV would like to acknowledge the great generosity of the Elders and the carers who participated and pay particular tribute to the indefatigable



Artistic Director of the Possum Skin Cloak-Making project Vicki Couzens, and lead artists Lee Darroch, Treahna Hamm and Maree Clarke.

working outside the box

On Monday 8 May, several Victorian cultural organisations, including the Cultural Development Network, Regional Arts Victoria, Museums Australia Victoria, Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres and the Cities of Hume and Yarra Valley, joined forces to deliver a one-day forum titled *Working Outside the Box*, which examined the role of cultural facilities in community strengthening. The forum was convened in response to the State Government's *Moving Forward* framework announced last year which will inject \$28 million dollars of new funds into infrastructure and programming for regional facilities. This partnership of organisations felt it was timely to take a look at some best-case examples of facilities working effectively with their communities to ensure the benefits were experienced broadly, not just by a privileged few.

Approximately 160 people, including 30 presenters attended,

most from local government, and smaller numbers from performing arts centres, museums, art galleries and other arts centres respectively. There were also several artists and independent artworkers and volunteers from community arts organisations.

Keynote speaker Paul Reeve, Director of Education from the Royal Opera House, London, spoke about his organisation's long standing program of engagement with schools and communities in England, especially those who are not traditional theatre goers. This included a contemporary version of the opera *La Boheme* featuring hip-hop, beat-boxing and real opera music, created and performed by young people from a multi-cultural inner city London neighbourhood and recorded on DVD, a sort of *La Boheme* meets *To Sir With Love* with dialogue stolen from *Neighbours*.

A day of case studies and discussion was brilliantly rounded out by a hypothetical discussion hosted by Professor Peter Sheldrake. His hand-picked panel wrestled with the dilemma of what to do with a windfall from State Government of \$250,000 for a community project, an amusing, and possibly too real, expose of what can happen when too many vested interests collide.

Attendees all noted how useful it was to reflect on this important issue amongst a room full of colleagues. Organising partners also found the collaborative exercise fruitful and hope it may lead to future working partnerships. RAV would particularly like to thank the Manager of the Cultural Development Network, Kim Dunphy for her efforts in bringing all partners together.

letters to the editor

Nine artists, selected for their affinity with the environment, walked The Great South-West Walk earlier this year as part of a project that aims to present a body of new work at Portland Arts Centre in 2007. The diversity of their practice will ensure a rich interpretation of the experience. It is hoped the work will tour regionally and interstate.

photos by

Great South-West Arts Walk

The Great South-West Walk
Beginning and ending at the Visitor Information Centre in Portland, the 250km long Great South-West Walk is billed as one of the world's greatest outdoor experiences. The walk encompasses many naturally occurring land formations, sea scapes and places of profound beauty. Notable features include Lawrence Rocks, the Enchanted Forest, Bridgewater Bay, the Blowholes, the Petrified Forest, the rugged Southern ocean along Discovery Bay and the Cobboboonee Forest.

The idea for the arts walk began early in 2005 when artists Ilka White and Carmel Wallace experienced a section of the Great South-West Walk. Ilka, a Melbourne-based textile artist, had been selected several years earlier for the Portland Art Company's first Emerging Artist Residency Program and had since been involved in Birds Australia's Newhaven Project. Both experiences made a strong impact. Carmel, a local artist and printmaker who has made her home territory the subject of her artwork and her PhD thesis 'Art and Environment', also had several successful arts projects under her belt. The community support was very strong. An in-kind contribution of a dedicated Communication Officer from Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority was a huge help in the administrative and logistic effort of sourcing funds and selecting and confirming eight artists' availability for three whole weeks,

feeding and accommodating them and keeping them dry. The pair also needed to arrange for speakers, field naturalists, friends of the GSWW, historians and conservation volunteers to provide support to the artists en route. "It was really important that the whole experience be orchestrated in advance, to round out the experience for everyone involved, and to make sure that as artists we were as informed as possible about the land," explained White. "Involving so many people with a deep concern for the environment, a love of the country, was fundamental to the project." The artists selected for the project were all known for their affinity and concern for the environment as demonstrated through their art practices. This would be an extraordinary opportunity to immerse themselves in their passion. In March 2006 nine handpicked artists gathered

at the start of the Great South-West Walk to begin their three-week, 250km trek, to absorb, inhale and digest the unique beauty of the far south-west corner of Victoria.

The artists:
Carmel Wallace: printmaking/drawing [Portland Vic]
Ilka White: textiles [Vic]
John Wolseley: drawing/painting [Bendigo /Melbourne Vic]
Vicki Couzens: mixed media [Koroit /Portland Vic]
Peter Corbett: video and installation [Portland Vic]
Brian Laurence: soundscapes [Vic]
Nicky Hepburn: jewellery and precious objects [Vic]
Fiona Hall: mixed media/sculpture [SA]
Jan Learmonth: sculpture [Vic]

The artists' brief was to walk the *Walk* and then produce new art in response to that experience. The mix of artists was crucial to the experience. "We felt that bringing so many disciplines to the project meant that as artists we all benefited from being in the mix," explains Carmel. "This way the outcomes would be accessible to so many more people. Some people will be drawn to the textiles, some to the film, some to the drawings. We are envisaging a very comprehensive outcome." The artists spent five days in each of the four sections of the *Walk*: the Cobboboonee Forest, the Glenelg River and Gorge, Discovery Bay and Mount Richmond and Three Capes and Bays. Nearly all of the artists did almost all of the *Walk*, with a little juggling of plans to

cope with some last minute emergencies. Their journey began on March 21, 2006, celebrated with a smoking ceremony and a heartfelt speech from the Gunditjmara Elder who spoke of the significance of the project and 'walking this land together'. The ability of artists to produce work en route varied depending on their practice. John Wolseley (drawing/painting) was producing work in situ from the start. "I did a lot of work in the Cobboboonee Forest section. I wanted my work to describe that sensation of how you walk in a forest... scrambling, swaying scratching," he said. Video-maker Peter Corbett, with some purpose-bought lightweight equipment, also managed to get straight to work,



John Wolseley

“It was a brilliantly imaginative idea...to experience the Walk not just with the usual two eyes and one nose, but with eight pairs of eyes and eight noses, all from different disciplines, was marvellous!”

shooting hours and hours of material that will ultimately be edited down to a more concise work of art, as well as a mini-documentary of the Walk.

Other artists were not so able to work in their usual way, but used the time to absorb the experience, examine the details, taking notes, collecting, sketching – and sharing their thoughts.

“It was a brilliantly imaginative idea,” enthused Wolseley. “To experience the Walk not just with the usual two eyes and one nose, but with eight pairs of eyes and eight noses, all from different disciplines, was marvellous!”

The artists have now resumed their lives and begun their work. All were overwhelmingly positive about the experience – the concept, the execution, the bon vivant.

Vicki Couzens, an Indigenous artist who recently led the creation of 35 possum skin cloaks for the opening ceremony of 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, a project co-ordinated by Regional Arts Victoria, was particularly thrilled to walk through her grandmother’s Country. “I tried to look beyond the views, to see and feel the unseen,” she said.

Ilka White spoke of multiple epiphanies. “It truly changed my relationship with the world. And there was definitely a feeling of returning to a secret childhood world. To lie cradled among the dunes being slowly buried by sand and swirling winds. To see views so beautiful that I didn’t know whether to run back and get the others or stay and keep it all to myself.”

One of the remarkable things about this walk, which every artist noted, is that it has been built, and is maintained, by volunteer effort, a mammoth task and an insight into the community’s passion for their patch.

Further information

<http://www.greatsouthwestwalk.com>
<http://www.greatsouthwestwalk-art.com>
<http://www.netsvictoria.org>



photo credits



photo credits



Pip Shea
New Media Artist

Pip Shea is a new media artist, web designer and community arts worker. Her interests lie in hybrid arts and convergent media practices and how these forms can be utilised for art making and the dissemination of ideas. Shea now works specifically with digital media. Her design background has led her to communicate visually through net art, projection, animation and multimedia installation. She worked with young people in three regional communities to create animations/blogs/audio/video

and digital images for super-size projection. Shea delivered a series of workshops designed to encourage exploration of digital media to create art and as a tool for positive change in the lives of the participants.

Bitscape Bits combine to create new scapes

caption
photo by

Bitscape, a community digital arts project delivered across regional Victoria and NSW, kicked off in the Macedon Ranges, travelled to Moe and Morwell in the Latrobe Valley, and then travelled on to Wagga Wagga in New South Wales.

The *Bitscape* workshops explored animation, blogging, digital audio, digital video, stencilling and image-making, as well as notions of place and identity. They culminated in a series of stunning large-scale public projections of these youth-made artworks on to local iconic landmarks.

Combining traditional forms of art-making with digital techniques proved an engaging strategy. Participants were encouraged to mix things up. In Wagga Wagga, for example, participants used Adobe Photoshop™ to manipulate images to create stencils. Then they cut the stencils out and used spray paint to create images. The images were then scanned and printed as 18cm x 18cm slides for the projector. The process began digitally, reverted to old-school techniques, incorporated another digital process, then was printed using analogue technology. The rules were there were no rules.

Shaking things up like this, combined with the large-scale public projections of the work, the website and the blogs, made it a really exciting project for participants, who responded by lifting their creativity up a notch.

In the Latrobe Valley, artworks created by Koorie students of the Woolum Bellum Campus were digitised for projection on to the 90 metre-high cooling towers at the TRUenergy power station in Yallourn North; in Wagga Wagga digital images were projected on to the iconic Civic Theatre; and in the Macedon Ranges animations, video and photography were projected on to scrims as part of a live theatre performance.

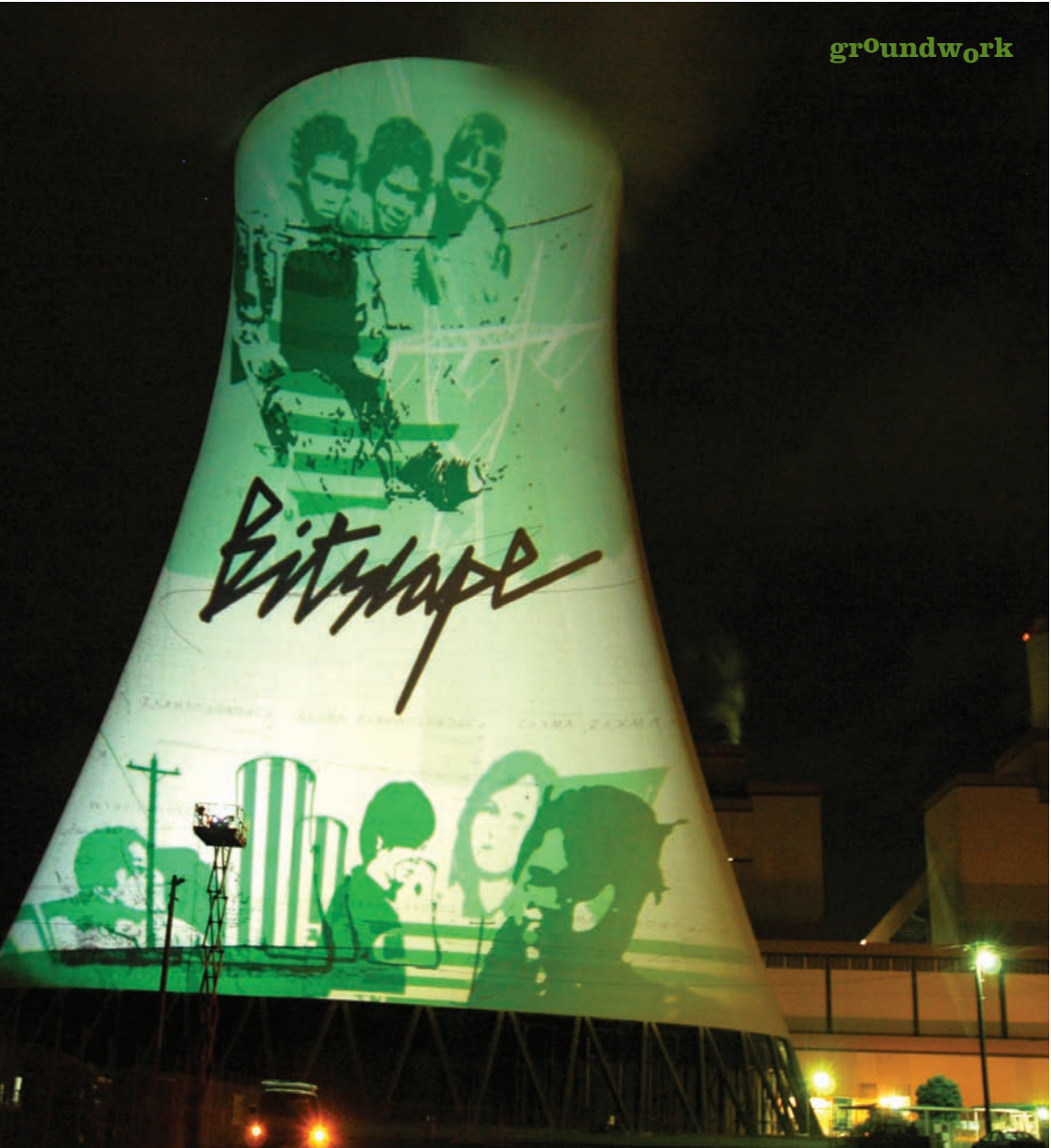
The model for the *Bitscape* project grew from the 2004 Next Wave Festival project *Colliding Worlds* where I was one of four artists working with young people from across Victoria.

Both the *Bitscape* and *Colliding Worlds* projects provided each participating community with its own unique workshop program and significant local outcome, then provided an opportunity to reassemble the work, digitally and collaboratively, for an artistic finale.

For *Bitscape* 2006, the project peaked at Experimedia as part of the Next Wave Festival and the Youth Program of the Cultural Festival of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. The work is also showcased online at the youth web site NOISE.

The model seems to be emerging as a fairly useful one: have a great core idea that is loose enough for a completely local interpretation; develop local skills, interest, resources and enthusiasm; make sure there is local celebration of the artwork and its creators; and then have a high profile showcase that really spreads the message (and of course, seeds future art and funding opportunities).

As the primary trainer and producer for an arts project across three regional communities with a metropolitan outcome, I admit there were challenges. Each of the three communities had ten work-



shops running over a couple of months, so I covered a fair distance. The very different demographics and skill levels, between and within groups, forced me to think about the workshop design. We needed to keep the program flexible because conditions, access and skill levels varied so much from group to group. I found managing the art and the logistics pretty challenging. In future projects I'll definitely consider outsourcing some of the production components.

A web site is of course irresistible, if not essential, for a digital project. The *Bitscape* web site added not only to the immediacy of the project, but continues to serve as an accessible archive of the project and helps to give these young artists a real sense of the wider project beyond their own experiences.

Generous sponsors allowed the project to be delivered on a healthy budget. Having money to pay contractors properly, to buy quality materials and to hire the right equipment made for an enjoyable and efficient production process.

Those who took part in the project were genuinely excited by digital art-making. Their intuitive reactions to both the conceptual and the technical aspects of the project were humbling and heartening.

Further information
www.nextwave.org.au/bitscape
www.popomo.com
www.noise.net

Jim Sakkas
Writer and strummer

Jim Sakkas is a writer and strummer living in Mallacoota. Jim has published 2 novels: *Ilias* which won the The Australian/Vogel Literary Award in 1987; and *Stella's Place*. He is currently working on a film script. Mallacoota Arts Council has long been known for its extraordinary arts festival, but has recently returned to its more contented roots of making music for pure pleasure, among other things.

Strum Founders John and Jocelyn Grunden won this year's RAV Award for their sustained and outstanding contribution to arts and culture in Mallacoota.

Mallacoota's Music Program has been funded by VicHealth's Community Arts Participation Scheme, the Australia Council Music Board and East Gippsland Shire Council's Community Events program.

Mallacoota Strum Club

Ours is a far-flung community of about 1,000 people, with a history of giving vent to the arts through our annual Easter festival and the many other events organised by the Mallacoota Arts Council.

There are times however, especially after Easter, when the tourist crowds have thinned and winter sets in, that access to live entertainment becomes less plentiful, and the locals become (how shall we put it?) a little restless. This is when Strum Club comes into its own.

A creation of John and Joycelyn Grunden, Strum Club allows us locals of disparate (or is that, desperate?) musical abilities to gather together every Sunday afternoon to make, and partake of, our own entertainment. Every Sunday at around 4pm the hard-core of twenty or so strummers and singers commune religiously for our weekly fix of music, mayhem and fun.

Only two commandments are observed at the shrine of Strum. They are: there is no such thing as a mistake, and thou shalt have fun. And while some of us do occasionally stray from these edicts, mostly we do our best.

Testament to the wisdom of these tenets is that Strum, now in its 12th year, continues to go from strength to strength.

In the twelve years of its existence, Strum Club has had to move on in search of a home. From its meagre beginnings in the back room of the Mudbrick Pavilion, we have been to the pub, the golf club, the bowling club, the Tide Restaurant, the slab hut shelter-shed in the Camp Park, only to come full circle and once again find ourselves back at the mecca of the arts in Mallacoota — the Mudbrick Pavilion.

Week to week, the number of Strum participants waxes and wanes, from as few as a dozen to as many as seventy. At the culmination of Music Week in June last year (organised by Mallacoota Arts Council), we had a monster strum with over seventy strummers. There were all manner of instruments, guitars, double bass, oboe, violins, flute, mandolins, banjo, piano, mouth organs, squeezebox, and a vast array of percussion devices to hit and shake. Justin Brady, a regular Mallacootarian and extraordinary musician from *Things of Stone and Wood*, couldn't credit how fat the sound was. He grinned all day as he cruised through his mandolin solos. Padma Newsome gyrated Rasputin-like, mesmerised us with heavenly sounds from his honeyed viola; and behind it all was the pulsing heartbeat of John Grunden's double bass. It was divine, as seventy voices mingled together to the words of *Under the Boardwalk*. Powerful, soulful, uplifting stuff!

The philosophy of Strum, according to the founder, venerated elder and inveterate raconteur, John Oscar Grunden, is simple. "Music should be part of everyday life, just as it is in traditional cultures. People should participate in it, and make it themselves." To that end, Strum Club is welcoming and inclusive of all, whatever their level of musical ability.

We have to resist the temptation of just being consumers of art. The paradox of our modern culture is that for all our access to the world's best music and musicians, most of us are reluctant to make music ourselves. And it is precisely because music recordings are so good, so professionally produced, that they make our fumbling efforts seem paltry and pathetic in

Caption
photo by



Jim Sakkas
“Only two commandments are observed at the shrine of Strum. They are: there is no such thing as a mistake, and thou shalt have fun”



comparison. But we have to put aside these feelings of inadequacy if we are to experience the sheer joy and communality of making music together. Therefore, verily I say unto you, brothers and sisters, the doors to the shrine of Strum are open to everyone!

Over the years, Strum Club's reputation has grown to such an extent that out-of-towners now seek us out. These range from visiting performers such as Justin Brady, Ross Webster, Jennie Swain, The Lonesome Wrecks, to regular holiday makers such as the group of Vietnam veterans who holiday here every March. It's great to have these visitors join us because it lifts the energy levels and the level of our playing and singing. There is nothing better for morale than having guests joining us in song, or listening to a searing solo accompanying us. You see a visible infusion of joy and volume in the sound and body movements of the strummers and the group as a whole.

When it is working well, there is no better feeling of togetherness and belonging and the safety in numbers allows people to try out things. I learnt how to sing harmony by trying it out within Strum's generous and forgiving environment.

Although we aren't meant to be a performance group, the Strum Club has on occasions been asked to perform at various community gigs such as the annual seniors Christmas dinner, kindergarten fundraisers, the annual Genoa Talent Quest, and even at the funeral of one of our strummers, May Gaunt. We

also play on a regular basis at the Genoa pub, and have been invited to play at Cann River. Our fame, it seems, is spreading. Today East Gippsland, tomorrow the world. If the Buena Vista Social Club could do it, why not Strum?

For a club that has survived this long it has been amazingly free of dispute or controversy. Okay, there was the joker who thought he could run a slicker Strum, but it lasted all of two weeks. And there was the visiting nun from Orbost, a great character who rode a motor scooter and came regularly to sing, with gusto — even songs with rather suspect or risqué lyrics. Nothing seemed to phase her until Stewy our local policeman chose John Lennon's *Imagine*. And that is where she drew the line. "Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try; No hell below us, above us only sky." She politely but firmly requested to have that song struck from our list. Strum deliberated, but decided that as it didn't offend anybody else we would continue playing it, with the proviso of warning our sister beforehand so she could take herself outside for a smoke or a drink, or just breathe deeply the fresh air of the Southern Ocean. She seemed happy with that.

People have been known to grumble about our habit of choosing the same songs week in, week out. And the few teenagers among us such as Rachel and Roy Severs would prefer us to play Nirvana or Green Day instead of Neil Young or all those mouldy tunes from the 50s, 60s and 70s. But such are the

vagaries of running the group on consensus lines. And while it could always be streamlined a little more, Strum Club's formula has proved enduring and successful.

Here is how it works: Strummers start arriving at the Mudbrick in dribs and drabs, catch up on the week's gossip, exchange banter, nurse hangovers, crow about or bag their football team etc. A bit like Brown's cows, really. Joycelyn hands out copies of songs to people who need them, and then after a few tentative starts we begin in earnest.

It usually takes a couple of songs (and for me half a stubby of VB) before the spirit starts to stir, and we begin to flex our musical wings, preparing for flight. Before we know it, Peter Sands is in full voice, Nikki Mitchell is moving rhythmically and making out she's really Joni Mitchell, Hobbo is crouched over his mandolin transported to another place, Glenys Fox shares a knowing glance with Pam Bobbin, Rachel has forgotten she's with a whole lot of oldies and is putting down serious bass riffs, and we are all feeling the spirit well and truly back. Strum is back for another week. Hallelujah!

And my God, is that the time? Six-thirty, already! We usually end proceedings by singing *Goodnight Irene*. So when John declares it's time for *Goodnight Irene*, a tinge of melancholy creeps in. But Goodnight it is — and may the spirit of Strum be with you.

Lindy Bartholomew
Director,
Regional Arts Victoria

Critical Moments for Festivals

We've all heard of the seven year itch in which relationships are supposed to hit a critical juncture where familiarity breeds either boredom or complacency, neither of which contribute much to the potential survival of the match.

My own long-term love affair with festivals hit a rough patch after about seven years. I had been publicist, then director then general manager for the Mallacoota Festival for about five years, then director and later artistic director for the Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival for two years. I'd had a lot of fun, but I was also feeling a bit jaded, unappreciated and exhausted. I could only see the faults, the problems. My festival glass was half-full. I jumped ship, moved to the city, fell in with a big theatre company and only occasionally looked back, wondering what might have been if I had faced the problems with a little more patience and willingness.

Regional Arts Victoria is currently working with four regional Victorian festivals on a project called *Common Ground*, which seeks to use arts practice to tackle the problem of community engagement. The experience of again being immersed in the world of festivals, up close and personal with the triumphs and tribulations, prompted me to ask what are the factors that contribute to that moment of crisis for festivals. Some seem to experience a hiccup around seven to ten years, some rally a bit longer and have a crisis at twelve to fifteen years, and some appear to thrive for twenty years without a harsh word spoken before self-combusting overnight.

Can you see the crisis coming, and if so, can you avert it?

In April this year, Horsham presented its 11th annual 'Art is...festival,' a six-day community celebration with a diverse program of performance, exhibition, workshops and film. *Art is...* was started in 1996 by a group of Wimmera based artists wanting to provoke arts action in the region rather than importing art from outside the region. Each year a new theme is devised to question a new aspect of what 'art is.' Over the years, art has been agriculture, energy, many voices, a river of time, an open door, a circus, freedom, a changing land, a celebration and, in 2006, the year of the Commonwealth Games, a common well.

Carolynne Hamdorf has directed six of the eleven festivals - the first four and the last two. She agreed that there was a point for a festival when the original core team hit some sort of wall. Exhaustion was a key contributor, but the reverse side of that coin is succession planning. Why was it that so many festivals have trouble training new people to become part of the core team?

"It is hard to mentor someone through the delivery period because there is just so much going on," Carolynne said. But she noted that it is critical that avenues are made for mentoring. Understudying can work if someone can be teamed to work in a defined and discreet way with someone, so they are not overwhelmed.

The bigger problem, Carolynne felt, was getting locked into the development/delivery cycle and not taking the time out for forward planning. "My personal view is that the annual delivery model is not the best one. For this town, which has the Nati Frinj and the Awakenings Festival, there are possibilities for exploring a biennial, or even triennial delivery, with other key events



Captions
photo by



working to complement each other. This would allow for a bit of artist and community development in between the delivery years. In the off years, you could do workshops, master classes."

Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival this year delivered its twelfth festival. Founded by celebrity cook Stefano de Pieri and a like-minded group, including his wife Donata Carrazza, the festival last year achieved recognition by the State Government as one of only two regional festivals with major festivals status (the other is Castlemaine State Festival). As the festival has grown, it has continually examined the way it operates and tried various ways of addressing the sustainability issue. Last year it adopted the 'guest Artistic Director' model, which aimed to allow for new energy to enter the core team, to see the event and the community with fresh eyes, and to get excited all over again about the possibilities of celebrating local identity. Current Festival Director Helen Healy believes that while this has provided some fresh energy, it is not without its problems. "Not having a Festival Director who stays longer than a year or two has created continuity problems," she said. "This year, I was appointed as Festival Director, only 3 months out (with Christmas in between) so the development stage for the 2006 festival was really tight for myself and the Artistic Director."

The original idea behind the guest AD role was to bring in a high profile person, partly to lift the profile of the festival, but

also to add an element of curatorship. "There is so much to choose from when programming," Helen said, "but having an experienced or informed approach to selection would have not only allowed the festival to make a stronger statement, but would also have mentored the Board through this important aspect of programming." She hopes the Board will soon review the guest AD role, not just in relation to timeline problems. "I don't necessarily believe the AD needs to be from outside as we have a wealth of talent within our own community and particularly on our Board."

Helen believes that the way Boards and committees operate in regional Victoria is of interest when talking about sustainability. If you want to attract new or younger people, you need to mentor them about how boards interact. "Our Board has historically been made up mostly of men who are established community leaders and who sometimes develop ideas outside the Board room and bring decisions to the table for ratification.

This has created difficulties for new members and meant that artistic ideas and possibilities were not always thrashed out with the widest possible input."

In order to create new pathways for younger people into festival management, this year Helen mentored a youth committee of five key people to organise the Rock the Lock event. "They did everything," she said, "risk management, security, programming." Unfortunately,

one of the worst accidents in Mildura's history happened exactly one week earlier, with the loss of six teenage lives. Like many people in Mildura, Helen was directly affected. Her own fourteen year old daughter had wanted to go to the party and lost a friend in the accident, so in the week that followed, they were caught up in their own grief. Many in town wanted the Rock the Lock event cancelled, but Helen and the festival Board attended a community meeting arranged by the police, the chaplaincy and the Principals Association and argued that going ahead was the right thing to do. "There is no better way to bring people together after such a shocking thing than through music and art," she said. At the event, a short but appropriate and moving tribute was paid to the teenagers. The youth organising committee responded with great maturity to a really tough situation and Helen hopes that at least one of them will soon join the Board.

One of the things Helen believes is working to support the long-term viability of the festival is the year round 'manager' role that she is now playing. With an office in town and her own event business, she is well placed to keep things moving and there are some economies of scale. The festival has also successfully established two other annual events which help keep the momentum going locally and year round. *The Writers Festival* (July) and the visual arts installation event *Palimpsest* (September), both have their



own festival directors and committees but are guided and auspiced by the festival Board.

Rob Robson is Manager Performing Arts for the City of Greater Shepparton and has also been a voluntary Board member for the SheppARTon festival since its inception 10 years ago. He believes the festival hit its crisis point at about seven years, and puts this down to the failure of the import model to excite the broader local community. "The festival was set up by professional people who wanted to raise the cultural standard in town by presenting an annual feast of high-end performing arts events," Rob explained. "It was typically a festival highlighting elite performances 'by others', and in many ways was not easily accessible to a large proportion of local people."

In addition, the advent in 1998 of a regular year round program of in-bound, touring,

professional performing arts at the new arts centre made the original impetus less relevant, even to those who had first established the festival.

Fortunately, the Board understood that they had reached a sort of crisis point. There was much talk of cultural diversity, but no real understanding of how you actually value this diversity. A facilitated planning session enabled the core group to realise that celebration is not necessarily about importing high culture but about supporting a strong sense of place. The focus shifted to balancing inbound programming with community participation, and celebration of local art making.

Rob agrees that making the festival relevant to the general community is still its key challenge but at least now they understand what the challenge is. The voluntary Board is now excited about building the festival so that it becomes a

genuine and widely endorsed celebration of Shepparton as a special place.

Carolynne Hamdorf offers a few final reflections on the life cycle of festivals. "We have to remember that ten years is a remarkable achievement for a community event. *Art Is...* is still achieving what it set out to do. This year we focussed on engaging youth and men, and forging links with the church community, and we did that well. But festivals do have a life and we all need to learn not to flog ourselves. Like a footballer, you have to know when to hang up your boots. If the group can make the decision collectively, I think we should all be liberated enough to do that."

Does that mean art is... a banana lounge and a daiquiri?

Carolynne Hamdorf

"But festivals do have a life and we all need to learn not to flog ourselves. Like a footballer, you have to know when to hang up your boots."



Showcase Victoria is the performing arts event for Victorian artists, producers and presenters to meet face-to-face and explore touring opportunities across Victoria. A joint initiative of Regional Arts Victoria and the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC), the annual showcase allows centre managers from across Victoria to view excerpts from producers in order to

start planning next year's season. Shows that receive widespread presenter support and that meet a range of funding criteria are subsequently developed into tours by RAV.

Showcase Victoria

Showcase Victoria:

- Starts conversations between presenters and producers
- Gives exposure to new work
- Gives artists and producers a better understanding of presenters' needs
- Allows presenters to appreciate the quality and range of work that is out there
- Is a very cost-efficient way of bringing the whole marketplace together.
- Ultimately gives audiences access to the best available performing arts experience

Dean Bryant (writer/director) and **Mathew Frank** (composer), both originally from regional Victoria, are a pair of award-winning musical theatre creators. They have just been told that they are 'in' for the next round of tour development from Regional Arts Victoria. And they are chuffed.

One of the pair's earlier productions, *Prodigal*, premiered off-Broadway in 2002, thus proudly earning the title of 'first Australian musical produced in New York City'. Several years, and three successful musicals later, their most recent offering *Virgins – A Musical Threesome*, is now ready to tour regional Victoria.

Developed over several years, with assistance from the Melbourne Theatre Company, *Virgins* made its world premiere in January 2006 at the CUB Malthouse. The season quickly sold out and received spectacular reviews. The production has been invited to the New York Music Theatre Festival, and will debut there with its original cast in September this year.

Earlier this year Bryant and Frank applied to RAV's theatre touring unit for the chance to stage an excerpt of their musical at **Showcase Victoria**. The application was accepted and the performance delivered to almost unanimous acclaim. RAV will now develop an itinerary and seek funding support for a Victorian tour for 2007.

The aim of Showcase Victoria is to enable RAV to work in partnership with VAPAC to develop tours that are culturally relevant, cost effective, and efficiently delivered. Each presentation is given a 20-minute timeslot which includes set-up and bump-out.

While the focus is on identifying potential regional tours for the following year, it's also a great opportunity for volunteer presenters or festival organisers to see a sampling of performances that could be suitable for community events. There's also an expo-style market place for those producers who don't stage a live excerpt but want to display their wares and discuss their work with interested presenters.

This year's **Showcase Victoria** was held at the Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre, South Morang over 8 and 9 May. Companies represented included HotHouse Theatre, Malthouse Theatre, Multicultural Arts Victoria and the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA), as well as many independent performing arts companies and artists. Art forms ranged across drama, dance, music, children's theatre, cabaret, comedy, circus and film. This year 35 productions were pitched, all up. Of those, around 13 have enough interest to develop fully-fledged tours for 2007.

Artists and producers who want to be considered for Showcase Victoria 2007 must complete a Producer Application Form, usually available from mid-February each year. A panel of regional and outer-metropolitan presenters makes the final selection as to which works will appear. Information about Showcase can be found on the RAV website at www.rav.net.au

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Dean Bryant & Mathew Frank, 'All roads lead to Melbourne', www.theage.com.au

Because we've had a show produced in New York, everyone says 'so when are you moving to New York?' That would be wonderful, but it's so easy to leave Australia and go somewhere else. What we're interested in is writing Australian stories and having them done in Australia."



Captions
photo by

BUYING AND SELLING YOUR PRODUCT

Most shows that tour do so through a 'sell-off' agreement. That is, the presenter agrees to purchase the show for a fixed fee. The presenter is then responsible for marketing and takes the full box office risk on the production.

Producers who want to tour need to assess the artistic and commercial viability of the work. They need to consider if it is suitable for regional audiences, which specific audience group it will attract, what a realistic price for the work is. Producers will also need to provide well-designed artwork for poster and flyer reproduction.

The Showcase Victoria process selects productions based on the level of presenter demand, geographical spread of presenter interest, diversity, artistic quality and the level of assistance required.

All the tours that RAV undertakes are developed twelve to 18 months in advance. Touring support includes establishing dates and itineraries, seeking touring support funds, overseeing all pre-tour arrangements, preparing contracts, centrally coordinating the distribution of primary marketing materials to the participating venues, being the lead contact during a tour's active period, resolving royalty payments to artists and undertaking all post-tour evaluation and acquittal.

Not Seeing Eye2Eye

Eye2Eye Theatre Company, based in Stratford in Gippsland, is an iconic, independent producer of live theatre run by the indefatigable partnership of Gillian and Clifton Kline. From humble itinerant beginnings, *Eye2Eye* settled some years ago in Stratford in the historic Courthouse and quickly established a passionate local following.

Producing seventy-five shows with over four hundred individuals in less than ten years, *Eye2Eye* demonstrably captivated local interest. Remarkably, for a rural town with a relatively small population, ticket sales soon became a viable source of income for the business.

Clifton Kline, known universally as Kline, puts the success of the venture down to its professionalism. Productions were well rehearsed, well designed, and well directed. The local community enjoyed seeing themselves onstage, especially their own kids. It was uplifting!

Eye2Eye was (and continues to be) applauded as an independent business in the arts sector. Business was going pretty well.

In 2003, the completion of the *Esso BHP Billiton Wellington Entertainment Centre* 20 kilometres down the road in the larger, stronger and generally busier town of Sale, had the unfortunate side-effect of threatening the very survival of this thriving regional theatre company.

Having led the cultural charge, the Klines were now almost a victim of their own success. *Eye2Eye* had helped cultivate a community of artists and an active audience for contemporary Australian theatre. The hunger for art this stimulated had helped land the community a

most glorious new home for the performing arts.

The new Entertainment Centre, with seating for 400, excellent facilities, an orchestra pit, a gorgeous café, foyer, meeting rooms, staff, technicians, promised pizzazz. It was big, beautiful, new and exciting.

Kirsty Ellem, the manager of the Entertainment Centre is an articulate and passionate visionary who is rightly proud of the diversity and quality of the cultural experience they are now offering. “We play a huge role in bringing quality artistic outcomes for audience and participants,” Kirsty said. And the feedback is consistently positive. “Users are very satisfied, and have become strong advocates for the Centre, many asking ‘why did we wait so long?’”

Kirsty sees her role as far more than just putting bums on seats. “We are creating partnerships, becoming involved in building the local *Water Water Festival*, developing a contemporary dance audience through our involvement in projects like *Bal Moderne* and attracting companies such as *Bangarra* and *Kage Physical Theatre*.” Importantly, Council is starting to see the Centre as a significant asset to attract population, to drive economic growth.

In the first year of the Entertainment Centre’s operation, audiences for *Eye2Eye* dropped by 40-60%. The thriving business teetered on the edge of viability. Kline became an outspoken critic of the Entertainment Centre, their programming policies, the impact on his business, and what he saw as the squashing of local creativity. In his words he, “kicked and yelled.”

In August 2005, *Eye2Eye* decided to close. The local community, however, had other ideas.

The Water Water Festival
photo by

Theatre interior
photo by



Esso BHP Billiton Wellington Entertainment Centre
photo by



They rallied, looking for ways to support this company that had become so integral to their identity. Supporters pressured their local networks for more creative opportunities to use *Eye2Eye*’s repertoire of skills such as school and corporate training projects. “The minute we decided to close I was made instantly aware of how important we were to the people here,” Kline said. “People told us that closing just wasn’t on.”

And so after a brief hiatus, the doors of *Eye2Eye* were tentatively re-opened. Both *Eye2Eye* and the Entertainment Centre realised that the community simply wanted BOTH. There was much work to be done.

Ellem said, “We had to sort out how we worked together. We really value what *Eye2Eye* has done and we want to do everything we can, within our own policies, to support them.” From Kline’s point of view, the Entertainment Centre had to take on board the impact it was having on what they did. Acknowledging *Eye2Eye*’s position, and the community demand for what they created, was fundamental.

The Entertainment Centre has recently made an arrangement to buy a show from *Eye2Eye*. It has been a significant step in smoothing the waters. “It was a show that they wouldn’t have had the resources to put on by themselves. We take the risk and we can seek funding that they may not be able to access,” explained Ellem.

Kline agrees that he has changed his

perspective too. “I learned to listen to what others were telling me. And that had a lot to do with stepping back and looking at the big picture.”

RAV Director Lindy Bartholomew was one of those who gave some constructive advice. She invited Kline to get more involved in the wider conversation. Kline took part in the forum: *Working Outside of the Box: The role of cultural facilities in community strengthening* which was held in conjunction with *Showcase Victoria* in May this year.

Attended by artists, presenters, producers and bureaucrats, the forum asked how do we measure the quality of cultural life? How can we be sure that the local culture is preserved and nurtured and not overtaken by outside forces? Being involved in the debate clarified Kline’s perspective, and to some extent gave him a network to bounce ideas off. It also reinforced the positive role bigger centres can play.

Gillian Kline

“The minute we decided to close I was made instantly aware of how important we were to the people here...”

Ellem said, “On the one hand *Eye2Eye* taps into and inspires the local community in a vital and intimate way. On the other hand, the Entertainment Centre has brought a huge increase in audience numbers who are now accessing cultural experiences that simply did not happen before.” The Centre was also a force behind Wellington Shire’s successful application for a Regional Arts Development Officer, another example of how success can breed more diversity and quality.

While the impact of the Entertainment Centre on *Eye2Eye*’s ticket sales raised a question mark over ‘importing’ culture, the alternative argument is also easy to see in action, that inspirational performances and workshops can leave a community with a far more capable group of artists – more connected, more excited, better resourced.

The case of *Eye2Eye* v the Entertainment Centre is a real life example of an increasing dilemma for governments and communities: how to support the coexistence of big and small, local and imported, spontaneous and sophisticated without destroying the community essence that prompted the dream for something bigger.

Both Kline and Ellem agree that the answers aren’t simple or evident but that it is only through mutual awareness and negotiation that they will arrive at a satisfactory solution.



Kim Hellard
Administration Officer, RAV

Kim Hellard meets Ange Newton, the publican that saved a town. Well, brought a little extra theatre to town and reversed the economic slide.

Caption
photo by

Harrow: Sound, Light and Beaut Blokes



The setting: Harrow. Anytime between 1836 and 1994. A gully surrounded by flatlands. Population 90.

The characters: The town's founding forefathers and mothers; the troopers; Major Mitchell; the lone school's principal; Aboriginal cricketer Johnny Mullagh; bushrangers; wenches; chinamen; local footballers; the woman who now runs the local hotel; and all the ghosts of Harrow's past.

By 1994, Harrow was feeling the effects of the "recession we had to have". Farmers with no cash, and the outlook for sustainability and survival bleak.

That is, until new hotel owner Ange Newton had an idea.

Having grown up in the South West region not far from Harrow, Ange was privy to the folklore of the town, the rich milieu of characters and stories that have permeated the lives of the town's descendents and newcomers.

Trying to survive in a small, isolated town had Ange thinking about ways of generating income and providing entertainment — having fun and creating a sense of cultural pride. With nothing but the stories of the town, and props "donated" from the tip, the *Harrow Sound and Light Show* was born in 1996.

How Ange Newton created this community-based production is a story in itself. "There is a guy who gave me a valuable piece of advice," said Ange. "Look at the problem instead of the solution."

The idea to create much needed income for the town was staring at her in the face: to use the town's folklore as the script for a show. The stories of the town doctor and midwife, the whorehouse, the troopers and the

bushrangers, all the characters that have their place in Harrow's cemetery.

The answer to "Who?" was clear. Each of Harrow's 90 residents knew the stories, and could ad-lib at will. Ange convinced 67 of them to play the characters of Harrow's story.

A skills audit of the team solved the "How?" creating costumes, sets and props. Anyone who could sew made costumes; anyone who could hammer nails built sets. Footballers who acted in tights doubled as security guards. The local tip became a hunting ground for props.

With a total lack of financial resources and little outside support, Ange and the people of Harrow used their creative thinking to solve all manner of problems even creating the lighting for this night time show with car batteries.

Another major plus for the show is that many of Harrow's original buildings still stand, giving this experience more resonance and credibility.

The *Show* is a theatre show with a difference. The audience is bussed around the town to different locations. En route, they hear the stories of the school, for example, while children, dressed in period costume, re-enact the day in the schoolyard. Then the stories of the hotel, the local doctor and the whorehouse. During dinner, the audience becomes part of the show, interacting with the historical characters of Harrow, and becoming a part of history themselves.

"There are so many funny stories that I can tell you," reminisces Ange, "but the one that I remember the most involves me playing the part of a busty wench, taking a group through the whorehouse. Trust me, there was no funny stuff going on; we just give people a whole-

some glimpse of what life was like! Anyway, there was this one young gentleman and being cheeky, and playing the part of the wench, I tried to take his jacket and pants off. Later on, he told me that the last woman who undressed him was his mother, as he was now a priest! But he laughed it off. It was all part of the fun."

The *Show* is a shining example of a cultural and theatrical experience created from the day-to-day resources that the townspeople of Harrow lived with, and probably like most of us, took a little for granted. The show is still running successfully after ten years.

Ange Newton believes that most towns could find a special way of creating a culturally significant and economically viable project.

In Harrow, the proceeds of the show are split evenly among all shareholders, namely the participants of the show, Harrow's residents. In return for profit, a stakeholder must provide two volunteers or four characters in order to keep the show running. This has proven to be a successful model for the *Show*, and successful for the economic future of the town.

While Ange has passed on the reigns of the *Show*, another issue that Harrow was facing became her next community project. Even though the Show was, and continues to be, a huge success, there was still a sense that the South West region needed more than just a weekly

show to draw visitors to the area. A fear faced by all small towns is that of losing its residents to the big smoke, and the impact that flows from that exodus.

Ange was struck by the lack of women, and by contrast, the number of "very cute bachelors" in the area. Quite apart from the issues of economic growth, Ange was also keenly aware of the loneliness and isolation the local men were facing. Solution? *Beaut Blokes*.

Beaut Blokes was designed with a more social experience in mind — to invite women from the city and other areas into the culture of the region and introduce them to the *Beaut Blokes* — the gems of the area.

"The design behind *Beaut Blokes* has serious connotations," Ange explains. "It is not a free-for-all, it is not a B&S Ball or a dating agency; it is a serious effort to bring women into the region to introduce them to a different way of life, and hopefully help build up our communities." Ange accepts that this is a difficult concept for many people to understand.

Beaut Blokes started in 2003 with 80 blokes from the region taking part in the inaugural event. Ange created a structure that would ensure the safety of the participants, the involvement of the entire community and with a bit of luck, new starts for many people.

The families of Harrow become hosts for the visiting women. The weekend starts on Friday night, with a meet-and-greet

with their local hosts. On Saturday, the women are introduced to the local culture and share in its activities, from farming to helping out in the shop. Saturday afternoon involves barracking for the boys in the local footy comp, followed by a mud bash or a bonfire. On Saturday night, the blokes meet with the visiting women at the Hermitage Hotel, a black tie affair. The rest is up to them.

"*Beaut Blokes* has achieved a phenomenal result. So far, there have been twelve marriages, four babies and many relocations," Ange said. The initiative has been re-created in Ouyen in Victoria's North-West and in Hyden in Western Australia.

Perhaps the biggest development (details to be announced soon) is that a national organisation wants to make *Beaut Blokes* a nationwide event and part of a rural development program to help other small and isolated communities reinvigorate their infrastructures, maintain growth and help local economies.

From a town with a population of 90 people, and a woman with a vision, the *Sound and Light Show* and *Beaut Blokes* are striking and inspiring examples of how resourcefulness and a can do attitude can create economic viability, art, theatre, interest from around the world – and bring a community back from the brink.

Contact:
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Harrow Promotion and Development
Group (03) 5588 1358

Ange Newton
"*Beaut Blokes* has achieved a phenomenal result. So far, there have been twelve marriages, four babies and many relocations,"

Marion Matthews
RADO, Wimmera Region

Marion Matthews is employed by Regional Arts Victoria in partnership with Horsham Rural City Council, Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack and Northern Grampians Shire Councils.

The initial funding for the project has come from Images of Age, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership and West Victorian Division of General Practitioners.

Wimmera Women's Circus We don't do Lycra!



If you think forty-five is too old to join the circus, there is a group of women in the Wimmera who will challenge your preconceptions.

Inspired by the Performing Older Women's Circus (POW) and workshops held during Horsham's circus-themed 2002 *Art is...* festival, a group of local women created a subsequent project called *We don't do Lycra* with the aim of giving older people in the Wimmera an opportunity to train in circus skills and to produce innovative and thought provoking performances that challenge traditional images of older Australians. The project provided professional circus skills training to a group of older adults working weekly with a local trainer and every six weeks with trainers from Circus Oz. The group developed a performance they are extremely proud of.

Out of this project was born the Wimmera Women's Circus.

By linking health and the arts, whole new sectors of the community can be drawn into physical activity that is at once stimulating, exciting and pretty good for you. The women in the group are exhilarated about performing. Many have had no previous experience of public performance and would not normally consider themselves fitness fanatics. Having come to grips with the reality of a live audience and the physical rigours of the circus, the group is now working to create a more developed story through their production.

The group is now continuing with a recruitment program which is attracting enquiries from a range of organisations who want to get involved. One regional school, whose Physical Education teacher initially trained with the group, is now working toward an integrated circus program in her school.

Wimmera Women's Circus
photos by Simone Dalton



David Briggs
Team Leader Regional
Cultural Partnerships, RAV

David Briggs talks to
Maz McGann, Arts Officer at
the Rural City of Wangaratta,
about why this innovative
sculpture event is a cut above
the rest.

North East Sculpture Event

DB: So perhaps just tell us what it is – a sculpture event with extra vitamins and minerals added?

MMcG: The *North East Sculpture Event* is an exhibition of sculptures both durable and ephemeral in the Merriwa Park in Wangaratta that is held every Easter weekend. It's outdoors and in public spaces where people go for a whole range of reasons apart from seeing art. A companion exhibition is also held in the local Exhibitions Gallery. This year it's a show of work by significant Victorian sculptors some of whom also have works in the park. The event is primarily funded through local government which means that there is stable investment that will allow for its development and increased visitation.

DB: So it is something of an incubator model?

MMcG: Yes, long term it will need to be self-funding but at the moment it has the opportunity to experiment a little while it establishes itself.

DB: What are some of the factors behind the development of this event?

MMcG: The notion of 'event' implies that it is more than an exhibition. We have programmed a range of features around the event that add value to the experience for both local and visiting artists. Forums and social events that are programmed into the weekend, from an informal get-together on Friday evening to the public art forum on the Sunday and other hands-on workshops, create conversations and sharing of ideas. This encourages the artists travelling to deliver and install their work and returning to collect to stay for the duration and interact with the community and other artists. Another feature of the event is that it's curated. A lot goes into the process: proposals, selection, installation and selection of a winner.

DB: It seems to me that this event provides an opportunity to experiment and explore what works, and what doesn't, in an outdoor space.

MMcG: Public art is increasingly a part of our landscape and there are a lot of interesting ideas in the field, but there are relatively few opportunities for regional artists to make outdoor work and to explore and learn from that experience, to see how people respond to their work, learn about the logistics of installing work and to be able to discuss their ideas with their peers. Given the nature of public art - being by definition in a dialogue with the public - this opportunity to explore and test ideas is very important.

DB: The public reaction to this event has been quite positive hasn't it?

MMcG: A park intrinsically is a place where people relax, it is their space and so the typical barriers to engaging with the work are removed, and the results are fantastic. It's great to see kids walking around, absorbed in deep discussion with their parents, talking about what they see, what they think and feel. I doubt they would do that very often in their lives elsewhere.

DB: When do you know that you do not have to keep adding content, but that you have a formula that is right?

MMcG: The Event is guided by audience and artist surveys which are evaluated by a local steering group they look at what worked and what is being achieved. We have added to the program each year and the challenge is now to look at what can be improved without over-reaching ourselves. The basic format is perhaps pretty close to working. Current responses seem to indicate that it is.

North East Sculpture Event

Making time, space and place for regional artists to show off, while at the same time inspiring and challenging them in their own work practices, is high on the agenda for most regions. Now in its fourth year, the North East Sculpture Event is establishing itself as a genuinely innovative program in the region, for lots of good reasons.

The primary aims of the Event are to:

- Provide opportunity to extend practice for local artists
- Provide scope for innovation in thinking about what can be done with art in public spaces - for both artists and the community
- Create opportunities for exchange between artists
- Keep the standard of work high
- Bring art into the lives of people



Captions
photo by



groundwork

Verity Higgins
Regional Cultural
Development Officer,
Ballarat Region

The project was funded by the
State Government through the
Office of Commonwealth
Games, The Sydney Myer Fund
and the City of Ballarat.

The Hanging Gardens of Ballarat

The Hanging Gardens of Ballarat

The mission: to convert a drab unwelcoming space into vibrant arts, cultural and educational hub. Ballarat meets Bollywood.



Wimmera Women's Circus
photos by Simone Dalton

As part of the Commonwealth Games cultural program, Ballarat's community arts practitioners, **RatArtat**, delivered the Ballarat Regional Community Engagement Project.

The vision was to engage the local community in the creation of a vast and vibrant artwork in Alfred Deakin Place, Camp Street. The project would have many facets. It would need to transform the uninviting bluestone Victorian streetscape and public square into an inviting and exotic garden. It would have a strong Indigenous component. It would also need to acknowledge Ballarat's adopted second team, India, by making visual reference to Bollywood.

The Camp Street precinct was redeveloped in 2000-01 to house the University of Ballarat's Arts Academy and incorporate extensions to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery creating the public space, Alfred Deakin Place. It was believed that this redevelopment would create a vibrant arts, cultural and educational hub in the heart of the city. Up until now, however, the community hasn't embraced the space.

Through February and March RatArtat set up the Camp Street Gardens Studio in the nearby Mining Exchange. For six weeks, in collaboration with EARTH Visual and Physical Theatre, they ran workshops with community groups, students, families and people who literally walked in off the street to create 2D and 3D artworks for the Alfred Deakin Place garden. EARTH also worked with Small Company and Community Theatre students from the University of Ballarat and local youth theatre group, MAYTE, to develop a large scale outdoor performance to complement the artworks. The community interest, support, involvement and commitment to the project grew exponentially, as did the garden.

One of the first artworks installed as part of the project was a large goanna designed by Ballarat based Gunditjmara elder Diana Nikkelson and sandblasted into the Art Gallery forecourt.

The drab, unwelcoming public space was transformed into a colourful inviting place of possibilities which was soon filled with the largely ephemeral community sculpture, including elaborate vines and flower pots created out of bright recycled materials.

Through this project the Camp Street precinct did indeed become a vibrant community meeting place due largely to the vision, professionalism and expertise of RatArtat and the many community members who became engaged.

Links:

www.ratartat.com.au
www.earth.comcen.com.au
home.vicnet.net.au/~mayte/



groundwork



Genevieve Roberts
RADO Golden Plains /
Surf Coast Region

Genevieve Roberts, local Lorne community member with a background in theatre and community arts, is an active proponent of the value of wearable art events to a community. Genevieve co-ordinated an Open House event at Figtree Community House in Lorne in late 2005. She now works alongside local Arts Development Officer Julie Dyer in the SurfCoast, as the Regional Arts Development Officer in the partnership between Regional Arts Victoria, SurfCoast and Golden Plains.

Wear Artrageous

photo credits



Wearable Art

Wearable art is an exuberant sub-genre of fashion design that surfaces every now and then in places as diverse as New York and New Zealand, usually in the form of a fashion event such as a parade or installation. Practitioners are often artists with craft skills, sometimes trained in colour theory, chemistry, sewing, clothing design and computer skills. Wearable art usually features individually designed pieces, often hand made, and sold or exhibited as art rather than a functional wardrobe addition. Regional Arts Victoria co-ordinated a state-wide wearable art project, *Decadent and Delicious*, in 2002 in partnership with Melbourne Fringe Festival which provided the framework for regional designers and artists to have their original creations displayed as art along side their metropolitan peers.



Julie Dyer, Arts Development Officer for the Surf Coast Shire, first saw the possibilities of wearable art at the Regional Arts Australia national conference in Esperance, WA in 2000. With seed funding from a Quick Response application to the Regional Arts Fund, Julie presented the first local version, an event called *Wear Artrageous*, in Airey's Inlet in August 2001.

Co-ordinated by vibrant local arts council Surf Coast Arts, the event received entries as diverse as a 'bird's nest skirt' to a 'bridal robe' which borrowed the form of Aireys Inlet Lighthouse. Participants were drawn from across the shire: Torquay, Aireys Inlet, Winchelsea, Lorne and Bells Beach. Soundscape artist Amanda Perry Bolt added a layer of auditory art and the seeds of a successful annual event were sewn.

Local artists Iris Walshe-Howling and Trish Edwards have developed a body of five Wearable Art pieces in the years since the

event was first staged. Iris, a skilled and experienced theatre director, was subsequently inspired to develop a performance art piece involving these works which was performed at Qdos Art Gallery in Lorne in mid 2005. By taking the concept from catwalk to gallery, the links between fashion, performance, sculpture and conceptual art could be emphasised.

Wearable Art was again reinvented at Open House, a one-day festival celebrating community and place, at the Fig Tree Community House in Lorne late last year. In a community at the mercy of tourist peaks and troughs and semi-permanent dwellers, the artwear was inhabited by performers who attempted to lure passers-by into the event, breaking down the division between locals and visitors.

Both these performance events were achieved on a minimal budget, with costumes, sound and performance elements all donated by the community.



Deb Milligan

I Regional Arts Development
Officer, Central Gippsland
Region

**Kim Hellard meets Ange
Newton, the publican that
saved a town. Well, brought a
little extra theatre to town and
reversed the economic slide.**

Foothills Family Music



Caption
photo by

Foothills Family Music started in the 1980s when three young mums learnt to play the tin whistle. Twenty years on they are still whistling.

Briagolong, a gold town established in the 1800s, is now home to a colourful community of artists, musicians, teachers, farming families, owner-builders and descendants of earlier settlers. As with many country towns, 'Briag' feels the effects of a general rural decline but works hard to maintain its sense of community and social cohesion.

Nearly twenty years ago three young mums began to master their instrument of choice, the tin whistle. The trio began running workshops and annual music camps, originally to bring music into their families' lives, but these camps soon attracted a wider interest.

Twenty years on, the Foothills Family Music Camp, is a thriving, authentic celebration of

culture within the community and continues to inspire new generations. Over a weekend in early April this year, the peaceful Mitchell River valley again echoed with wild percussive beats as Neda Rahmani, of Bomba fame, took participants on a journey to Brazil and back. It was inspiring to see lines of little kids, some barely as high as the drums, belting out a perfect tempo on the big bass drums while, for a time, the adults were relegated to shakers and bells. She also led the entire camp in an energetic dance workshop to start the night concert. Neda said, "We are all born with a heartbeat, so we all have rhythm."

There were also many different musical workshops throughout the weekend. John Francis held some wonderful marimba workshops. Lyndal Chambers and Brian Strating (fresh from performing at the recent Latrobe Space and Place) ran workshops in singing, story telling



Neda Rahmani

**"We are all
born with a
heartbeat,
so we all
have rhythm."**

with instruments, music-making for all ages and abilities and covering an amazing range of instruments – trumpet, clarinet, violin, guitar, accordion, trombone. Local dance teacher and choreographer Michele Ripper presented contemporary dance and body sculpture workshops, exploring the ways our bodies interact with each other and within space. Local teacher Rod Andrews ran an instrument-making workshop where children made their own hanging marimbas and shakers. And, true to her roots, committee member Deb Manning ran popular tin whistle workshops.

FFM Committee Member Jenny Candy puts the success of the event down to its accessibility. "While more and more events have come our way over the years, and our community has become much richer in that sense, there is still a lack of affordable concerts and a scarcity of inclusive workshops that make music accessible to everyone, not

just the musically talented," she said.

Over the years these two-day family music camps have brought artists from around the state, offering singing workshops with Melanie Shanahan, Therese Virtue and Eva Grunden, marimba-making workshops with John Madin and Andy Rigby, circus skill workshops with Team Henderson, drumming workshops with Mark Grunden and drama workshops with local director Clifton Kline.

"We often get visitors from Melbourne, as they find the combination of location and community engagement something that is difficult to access in the city," said Ro Gooch, one of the founding members. FFM also run concerts at least once a year. In 2000, Vika and Linda Bull agreed to perform, and according to Gooch, "those magnificent voices shook the rafters of our little old hall."

Some participants of early Foothills camps now have established musical careers and have formed their own bands. Local school teachers and workers from adult day care services come to the camps to improve their skills and learn new techniques. Local singing groups got their early inspiration from the concerts and camps. And of course, of great significance, are the friendships and networks developed, the sense of social cohesion and the sustenance of a strongly musical community.

"Our ultimate aim," said Gooch, "is to put home-made music into the home. To make people feel that music is for them, not just the experts. That's really what we are on about."



Liz Andrews
RADO, North-West Region

This project was funded through Vic Health’s Communities Together Scheme and Swan Hill Rural City Council. The Melbourne 2006 Queen’s Baton Relay was a joint initiative of Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Corporation in partnership with the Australian Government (Funding Partner), Tourism Australia and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

Passing The Baton, Swan Hill

Caption
photo by



An artist’s residency can be a fraught experience. Liz Andrews knows the value of project experience and some advance groundwork.

We often hear artists and volunteer arts organisations say of their communities, “Sport gets all the attention and funding in our town, not the arts!”

Swan Hill’s recent *Passing The Baton* project set out to raise the profile of local artists and arts in this sport-focused community by creating a community art project and capturing the spotlight generated by the Commonwealth Games Queen’s Baton celebrations.

Students from 15 schools across the rural Swan Hill municipality took part, including the Swan Hill Specialist School, Swan Hill’s KODE School and schools in several small, isolated communities. Each one worked with a local artist to create a temporary commemorative archway for the Queen’s Baton bearers to run through, en route to community celebrations at Swan Hill’s local park.

Each school worked with a different local artist for a week in November-December last year to workshop their ideas and decorate an archway. Students’ initial designs for the arches were displayed during a Council-run ‘Warming up for the games’ event on 20th November.

RAV worked with the schools and artists to ensure that the agreement between them was clear and workable. In many cases the artists had not worked with a community group before, and this agreement assisted both parties to clarify their expectations before their residency. We encouraged the artists and schools to discuss beforehand how and when they wished to hold the residency, how the artist would work

with the students, how many they were comfortable to work with, what materials they would use and to ensure an appropriate work-space was made available. RAV also sought funding from VicHealth’s Communities Together Scheme to provide an honorarium payment to each artist.

Corrections Victoria clients were enlisted to construct fifteen lightweight timber frames for the archways, which were distributed to each participating school, along with a small materials budget, contributed by Council from its Queen’s Baton community celebrations funding.

The resulting arches, each one over two metres tall, were erected in Swan Hill’s Riverside Park for the Queen’s Baton celebrations, creating a colourful tunnel, for the last baton bearer to run through. This happened to be *Strictly Ballroom* star, Paul Mercurio, originally from Swan Hill.

The project successfully capitalised on the attention being focussed on a major sporting event to bring many of Swan Hill’s talented local artists into the spotlight. Many of these local artists now have solid working relationships with local schools and a good model for undertaking future arts projects.