



NEWPORT FIDDLE AND FOLK CLUB

Annual Report

2008



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2008 has been a very interesting year for the Newport Fiddle and Folk Club. In our 4th year of operation we now have a bit of history, some official paid up members, we are incorporated and we have held our first Newport Folk Festival. As we grow and make decisions about what we are going to do, it is important that we reflect on our key purpose, then identify goals that are worth putting our energies into over the next 12 months. In doing so it is worth revisiting the formal aims of the club and to evaluate the extent to which they are being met. The Folk Club was established to:

- Provide a venue for those interested in locally produced music
- Provide opportunities for amateur musicians to get together, play and learn from each other with an emphasis on, but not restricted to, folk music,
- Provide opportunities for non musicians to come enjoy and participate in music through listening, singing, and dancing.

Beyond the monthly gatherings of the NFFC, the Club has a role to play in the development of young and older musicians through workshops and other planned musical gatherings. The NFFC aims to develop links with sponsors of the Arts to source funding for professional musicians who will be able to provide musical both leadership and inspiration for developing musicians.

This report is a review of the activities of the NFFC for 2008 and of the development of the NFFC as an organisation. It will also present the initiatives that will provide a path for the next stage of the growth of the folk club.

1. OUR ACTIVITIES

Monthly Sessions



The Monthly music sessions continue to be an important element of the folk club. Every month in 2008 was quite different, but each session provided the space for a true community of musicians to emerge, and with that, the development of a whole range of musical and performance



skills for the people who attended. We had some nights with more than 50 people (thanks to the choir) while others were more intimate, the music ranged from the folk ballads to the classics, there was some fantastic original songs, and lots of evenings where we were able to welcome guests who just happened along (like the nude cyclists from England!). The very simple tea, coffee and biscuits is all that was needed during the breaks to get people talking, sharing stories and in some cases initiating musical collaborations that have developed and lead to performances. A feature of this year's gathering was the range of people who lead the sessions – Christine, Alan and Neil all took turns in welcoming everyone, and creating an environment where people feel comfortable about presenting and sharing their musical talents. This augurs very well for the future as the sessions are not reliant on one person to bring this community to life.

The sessions will continue in 2009, with the only change being that they will now occur on the last Friday of each month (the consensus was that this would be simpler to remember).

See you there.

Newport Lakes Bush Dance

In March 2008 the Newport Fiddle and Folk Club and the Friends of Newport Lakes held our 3rd Annual Newport Lakes Bush Dance. This event was again sponsored by the Hobsons Bay City Council and was part of the Bayside Festival. It was a great day. The organisation of the event has become a straightforward exercise with both groups taking responsibility for various elements that make the day work smoothly. The promotion of the event through the Bayside Festival was again valuable and despite it being a very hot afternoon there was a crowd of about 200 people.

As a community event the afternoon had all the hallmarks of a success. The music was provided by the folk club with individual acts entertaining the crowd, and the Bush Orchestra providing the music for the dances, and people got up and danced and had fun. As has happened in the past, the event also introduced many local residents to the beautiful Newport Lakes Reserve. It also introduced many people to the Folk Club and to the Friends of Newport Lakes – these connections are the life blood of community organisations and so from this point of view it was a valuable exercise.



Many thanks to the Friends of Newport Lakes for the enthusiasm for the event and the collaboration with us in the Bush Dance. We look forward to another fine afternoon of music and dance in Newport Lakes in 2009 – the date is Sunday March 15 from 4 – 7pm.



Workshops

2008 was the year that the NFFC held our first workshops. Our aim as a club is to help people learn and develop their musical talents and so we decided to hold 5 formal workshops – for Fiddle, Guitar, Voice, PA, and Ukulele. We were fortunate to get a grant of \$2000 from Hobsons Bay City Council and these enabled us to engage professional musicians to lead the workshops. As it was our first time running workshops, the committee learned that marketing is a key element of making a success of the workshops financially and these skills will be most important as we run future workshops without the benefit of grants.



Gypsy Guitar Workshop with Dave Kryser

Money aside, the workshops were very successful on two levels – firstly they did provide participants with knowledge, skills and the motivation to learn more about their instrument (or PA) and opened up their eyes to where they might develop their skills. The fruits of this continue to emerge as people have channelled their enthusiasm into practice and the practice has become obvious in performance. In the case of the PA workshop we now have a number of people who are confident in ‘doing the sound’ at our gigs and at the festival and so the club has gained an asset from the workshop.

Secondly each of the workshops was an exercise in community building – the 4 hour sessions were quite intense and so people learned about each other and themselves, quite apart from their instruments. Naturally there was a wider range of skills that people brought to the sessions, and the leaders, and the participants, welcomed everybody. This is something quite valuable for our club to develop – this lovely spirit of a true community that accepts people as they are and provides a space where people play and learn. It is something that we need to consciously nurture in all of the activities of the folk club.

In 2009 the folk club is again going to run 5 workshops in the first half of the year. There will be three instrument workshops – Guitar with Peter Baylor, Fiddle with Sean Kenan and Mandolin with Bruce Williams. We are also introducing a Comedy Workshop with local comedian and writer Gary Adams and an African Dance Workshop with Suzi Mzuri Watts. These workshops open up the folk club to other elements of the Arts and we look forward to seeing where the skills that people develop lead the club in the future.



Newport Bush Orchestra

The Bush Orchestra, under the leadership of Greg O'Leary, has been a marvellous success story in 2008. After 3 years, the group has a stable membership of 14 players, they have developed a repertoire to provide the music for a bush dance, and they have the confidence to entertain their audience. They played at the Town Hall for visiting Japanese dignitaries and then again for the Harmony in Hobsons Bay Concert, played for the Bush Dance at Newport Lakes in March and at the Folk Festival in July, and then played at the opening of the Substation in November. The group is bringing Australia's musical heritage



to life and providing lots of fun and enjoyment to musicians and their audiences. The folk club would like to acknowledge the tremendous work and vision of Greg O'Leary who has brought this group to life – many thanks Greg, we are very lucky to have you as leader of the NBO and as a mentor to many members of the folk club.

Greg O'Leary & Newport Bush Orchestra: Williamstown Town Hall

At an organisational level the group is now self-funding, keeps thorough records of the weekly sessions which are emailed to all members and already has a number of gigs booked for 2009. After the summer break, Greg and the NBO are set to learn some more tunes (including a Herbie Hancock tune!), refine their technical and performance skills, and have another great year. If you are interested in joining the group, it is Monday nights at the Community Hall this year from 7.30 – 9.30pm.

The Folk Festival

In February 2008 the Committee bravely decided that it was the right time for the club to have its own Folk Festival in the middle week of the winter school holidays. The idea very quickly gained the support of our Community including the Council (our major sponsor), the Newport Traders Association, our local member (now Mayor) Peter Hemphill, and the local organisations including the Newport RSL, the Senior Citizens, the Bowling Club and the Junction Hotel. The Committee worked very hard to put together a program, promote the events and organise equipment and then nervously waited for the Friday night to see if anyone would come. Well, the first session was a hoot – lots of people, very polished acts (mostly NFFC members) and smiles on people's faces reflecting the enjoyment of being part of such a lovely gathering and celebration of life through music.



The rest of the weekend continued in the same vein – music at the Substation, Ukes at the Bowling Club, Concert in the Park, RSL kicking on all day and all night, a Bush Dance, the Sunday session including Gospel singing, Line Dancing, Concert, Community Market and then a few quiet drinks at the RSL to finish things off. It was a great event and all the talk was of ‘bigger and better’ next year.

The 2009 Festival is already taking shape. The Council and our other partners have agreed to again support the event and we already have other groups who are interested in becoming involved and developing the festival. The Substation is now open for business and we look forward to utilising it in a number of ways, including a Colonial Bush Dance on the Saturday night. We even have a Canadian fiddler who is coming over especially for the event. The Festival will again be in the middle weekend of the school holidays (3 – 4- 5 July) and we look forward to having as much fun as we did last year. See you there!

Newport Choir

One of the clear indications from the folk festival was that there was a need for a Newport Choir. The Committee successfully applied for a Community Grant to start a choir in the 4th term and Alan Davies took up the position of conductor. While we were confident that the choir would attract a good number of singers, we were very pleasantly surprised to see that the group now has 25 members and already sounds fantastic. They are



keen and appreciate Alan’s skills and dedication to the task. Alan has spent four days of his holidays at the Conductors Summer School and so he is now raring to go in 2009. Well done Alan on promoting the choir and getting it off the ground, and we look forward to seeing and hearing the choir in 2009. The choir will rehearse at Newport Baptist Church on Wednesday nights and welcomes all new members.

NFFC on the Web

The NFFC web site nffc.org.au continues to be an critical cog in the wheels of the folk club. It includes reports and photos, promotions, a calendar of events, links to other relevant websites. Importantly it has the hallmarks of a good website – it looks good, it is easy to navigate through and it is up-to-date. As a result it is used regularly by our members, it provides a reference point for potential sponsors, and markets the club to people who are browsing the web. A google search of ‘newport fiddle folk’ sends people directly to the site (top three results) and we regularly find that the site was the first point of contact for people coming to the folk club. Alan Davies designed and continues to maintain the site and we are very grateful to him. Many thanks Alan.



Breizoz and NOSH

There have been a number of spin-offs from the folk club that have been very successful in bring more music to our community. The monthly Music at Breizoz sessions (2nd Thursday, 7.30 – 10.30pm) have brought some very talented professional and amateur acts to Hobsons Bay, and have also provided a stage for NFFC members to perform in the lovely intimate setting of the Breizoz chapel. Well done Simon Leverton and Greg Hammond for creating the venue and making a success of it over the last two years. We wish you all the very best for 2009 and you will again see lots of NFFC'ers at the gigs this year.

NOSH café is another monthly gig that has sprung up in Newport in 2008. Elliot Daniel, the café's owner, is an enthusiastic supporter of the arts and he offered the Newport Gypsy Djangos a gig on the first Saturday of each month from 2-4 pm. It has been a valuable opportunity as it is an impetus for focussed rehearsals, and to develop their performance skills. It has become a bit of a meeting place for musicians and has helped to develop and strengthen the culture of music in Newport. Thank you Elliot for this opportunity and the band is looking forward to another year of being the café's resident band.

2. OUR ORGANISATION

As the Folk Club develops, we need to also pay attention to the non-musical dimensions of successfully managing our organisation. If we manage the folk club well, it will have the structure and systems to accommodate our growth that we plan to achieve over the next 5 years. This section of the report will address these key issues of developing the Folk Club as an organisation.

Incorporation

At the end of 2008 the folk club became an incorporated body. This means that we are now able to apply for grants in our own right and that we no longer have to operate under the auspices of Outlets Coop. We have been very fortunate that we have had the support of Therese McKenny-Campbell (from Outlets) over the last 3 years. She has been a very generous mentor to the committee and particularly to me and provided advice as to what we need as an organisation. Therese suggested that we become incorporated as the first step in becoming an independent organisation. However she has agreed to continue to auspice the folk club for another year while we develop a more complete understanding of the responsibilities of an incorporated body. For this we are very grateful. Many thanks Therese for your ongoing support in getting the folk club to where we are at the moment.



Committee

The Folk Club has been quite dynamic in 2008 and this has been largely due to the efforts of the committee throughout the year. The challenge of organising and managing the folk festival was the spark that energised the group. It also enabled us to discover and draw on the particular talents of each member. The Committee of Neil Jolly, Alison Dew, Chris Langshaw, Alan Davies, Rick Sidgewick, Christine McDonald and myself has become a very cohesive team this year and we have enjoyed working together. Our meetings have been purposeful, we clearly record our minutes and we have acted on the decisions that the group has made. I look forward to working with the committee in 2009.

We will hold elections for the Committee in August this year after the group has completed the organisation of our second festival. If there are any members of the folk club who would like to contribute to the running of the folk club we would be most interested to hear from you. The success of the club will depend on 'many hands making light work' but will also require the ideas and enthusiasm of our members to initiate and develop new ideas. If you have ideas that you want to develop within the club, come and speak with any of the committee members.

Memberships

2008 was the first year that we have introduced a membership to enable people to formally join the Folk Club. This is an initiative that is important for a number of reasons – not the least of them being able to approach potential sponsors and benefactors and show them that we do have a membership base. It has also been a source of income for the club and of course this is also an important element of a successful organisation.

We currently have 88 members – this is an excellent start for the club and we look forward to developing the membership in 2009. Membership subscriptions will fall due in July and we hope that all current members will see the value in being a part of the folk club. We also look forward to recruiting many new members during the year – it would be fantastic to have 200 paid up members by the end of this year. This is a nice goal to work towards in 2009.

Finances

It is only 2 years ago that the folk clubs finances could be counted in coins and our biggest question was whether we could afford Tim Tams or had to stick to Saladas for the coffee break each month. Well as of December 2009 we have a bank balance of just over \$7000. This has come from a number of sources – memberships, entry to our monthly sessions, the success of the choir, and a number of paid gigs that members of the folk club have played at. It is very useful to have this money as it enables us to try new ventures and do things which we know will be useful for the club and which may, or may not, be able to cover the costs. The 5 workshops that we are running are an example of this. We are committed to paying the workshop leaders and we have no guarantee that we will get the required number of participants to break even. Of course we would like to break even, and indeed make a profit if possible. However it is more important that we provide our members with the opportunity to develop their skills. Having money in the bank enables us to take these risks.



The committee has the responsibility for choosing how to manage our finances in 2009. I would like to think that they will continue to take some risks and explore the various ways in which the folk club will work to achieve its aims. The Comedy Writing and African Dance Workshops are examples of stretching the boundaries a little. It will be interesting to see what else we can do that will further develop the club and make it more relevant to the community that we serve.

I would like to take the opportunity for thanking Alison Dew for managing the finances of the club over the last 3 years. She has done a wonderful job. This year she is very pleased that she can hand the money over to Sue Davies who will do the bookkeeping for 2009. Thank you Alison, and many thanks Sue for taking on this most important job.

Marketing

The Folk Club needs to continually develop its profile in the community and to advertise what we are doing and why people might want to join the club. Christine McDonald has taken responsibility for the Marketing of the club in 2008 and she has been very successful in getting our story into the local papers as well as in the community music magazines such as Shout and the Folk Alliance Newsletter. Thank you for your work Christine and we look forward to lots of pictures and stories about the club in 2009.

NFFC and Our Community – 2009 and Beyond!

One of the measures of success of a community group is not simply how it satisfies the needs of its members but also how it engages with its broader community. The Folk Club has always had a clear sense of the importance of taking our music into the community. In 2008 we were again able to do this throughout the year. Musicians from the folk club played at Festivals (Williamstown and Yarraville), Schools (Wembley and Newport) and at Church Events in Newport and Williamstown. We also took musicians to regional Victoria with a group starting the year up at Colbinabbin for their Australia Day Celebrations, the Bush Orchestra played up at Echuca for the Steamboat Festival, and then the Bush Quartet played at Donald for their Community Christmas Event. Each of these community performances was appreciated by the hosts of the events. The events also provided the opportunity to make strong links with these communities. I am sure that the value of these links will become more evident over time.

In 2009 the NFFC will again engage with our community (our first event for the year is the Colbinabbin Singers and Songwriters Festival). Music is such a fantastic means of bringing people together and enlivening events - we are grateful to have the opportunities to play our part in strengthening communities that we are involved with.



The Newport Fiddle and Folk Club has become part of Newport and the Western Suburbs or Melbourne. We have developed a sense of community and have been a catalyst for many musicians to develop their skills and play and perform with other musicians. We have also staged a number of community events that have contributed to, and enriched, the cultural life of people who are part of our community. We have had a lot of fun over the last 4 years, and made many new and lasting friendship. Members of the folk club have developed the musical skills and confidence, and have performed and shared their music with the community. The committee has developed a whole range of organisational skills and I am confident that they can continue to initiate, plan and manage larger events in the no-fuss way that they operated in 2008.

It is a great pleasure to be part of a group of people who simply enjoy playing music. While I have been surprised by how quickly the folk club has grown in the last 12 months, I am not surprised that people are having a great time making music, making friends and wanting to share their talents with our community. This has always been the function of music, and it is as relevant and as important to our lives today as it has ever been. I am attending a Music and Wellbeing Symposium at Melbourne University in February (thanks to the support of the City of Hobsons Bay Council) and I look forward to getting new ideas about the ways in which we can develop the role of music in our community. As long as we continue to provide opportunities for people to play, the Newport Fiddle and Folk Club will thrive.

Our challenge for 2009 will be to continue to strengthen our links with our local and regional bodies so that we become a significant part of the cultural life of our community. That, and maintaining a solid organisation that can manage our growth, are the two serious goals of the folk club. That said, we don't want to take ourselves too seriously – if we can continue to play and have fun then I am sure we will be on the right track.

See you in 2009

Michael Stewart

January 27, 2009