

Wednesday, 24 February 2010



A Message from the Managing Director

Firstly, warm greetings to all loyal supporters, patrons, friends, colleagues and dedicated volunteers of the National Folk Festival!

As you will have gathered, I took over the reins last week from Jared Wilkins, as Managing Director of the National. I'd like to acknowledge the significant work Jared has done in developing sound operating systems and fruitful avenues for the National, leaving it in very good shape for the board and staff to continue into the future. A special thankyou to NFF Board Secretary Graham Chalker who has done a great job as interim Managing Director and provided me with much support in settling into the role.

Following 5 years with Brisbane Multicultural Arts Centre (BEMAC), and more recently, 4 years directing the Queensland Multicultural Festival on behalf of Queensland Government, I feel very privileged to be working on this unique event. The National does a great job of honoring its Anglo-Celtic folk traditions whilst extending its program into the folk traditions of the diverse cultures that comprise the broader Australian community, our growing number of overseas guests and our Indigenous community.

I would like to acknowledge the considerable contributions to the National Folk Festival of three long-standing board members who have tendered their resignations in recent months:

Neil Roach resigned from the Board in November 2009, having been associated with the festival for 13 years, including working as a Volunteer from 1997, Operations Manager for 5 festivals from 1999 and also serving as Production Manager. Neil was appointed to the board in 2004, subsequently serving for 6 years including serving as President in 2009.

John Taylor resigned in December 2009 after serving on the board since 1998, serving as President since 2005 and following many years of service in a variety of roles including coordination of security and American Music program advisor.

Graham Cruttenden tendered his resignation as Treasurer on the board in early February this year, having been the longest serving board member to date. Graham is resigning to take a well-earned rest. Graham will be dearly missed for his experience, understanding and sharp eye for detail in terms of the National's finances, as well as his good friendship. Graham will be at the National this year and able to take a slightly more leisurely view of things having contributed so much in the past.

I feel very confident of the diverse experience and qualification of the board to direct



and advise the National in positioning itself strongly and appropriately for its future growth. In particular, there are some very constructive plans to develop the educational side of the organisation's activities, as well as agreement on new avenues for planning the overseas contingent of the program and ensuring a strong line-up of well-known folk artists and exciting rising stars in the future. The purchase of the NFF Office premises is also a significant step forward and a great achievement during the recent global financial instability,

The early bird sales for 2010 are very encouraging, for what looks like being our best National program to date. The National is very fortunate this year to be the first port of call in Australia for renowned UK multi-instrumentalist and respected folk and world music journalist Andrew Cronshaw, in partnership with Canberra multi-instrumentalist, producer and long-time colleague Ian Blake. The enduring and fruitful partnership between Ian and Andrew has seen them collaborate with many world-renowned musicians, with appearances at such significant events as WOMAD in the UK and WOMEX in Spain.

Another prominent UK visitor to the festival in 2010 is Newcastle fiddler and singer Tom McConville who was the BBC Radio 2 Folk Award winner for 'Musician of the Year' in 2009.

Many of you will already be familiar with the line-up for this year which includes many other luminaries such as Uilleann piper Paddy Keenan, casting the legendary shadow of the Bothy Band across this hemisphere - along with such engaging performers as Eddie Reader and Emily Smith from Scotland, Chris Smither, Patty Larkin and Bob Malone from the USA, James Keelaghan and Genticorum from Canada, Faerd from Denmark and Sweden and our own Keith Potger, Felicity Urquhart, Cloudstreet, Taikoz, Tiffany Eckhart and many more.

Many thanks to Artistic Director Dave O'Neill and Programming Assistant Carolyn Griffin for their tireless work in developing another unique and colourful program. The line-up will also embrace cabaret and vaudeville, with the inclusion of the fringe festival in 'The Majestic' for the first time this year. The Majestic program will be led by the charismatic and eclectic Lolo Lavina with a range of virtuoso European music, alongside theatrical singer-songwriter Emma Dean, Circus Deathmatch with circus performances and workshops, poetry, the Fool's Feast Graduation Ceremony and a red-carpet dress-up Gala opening! The festival acknowledges the support and funding of the ACT Government's Multicultural Affairs team, led by Community Services Executive Director, Nick Manikis.

The dance program features a variety of styles including Playford English, American Contra, Tango, Salsa, Indian, Irish, Cajun, Zydeco and much more. Fabio Chivhanda from Zimbabwe will have you on your feet with the Jivemasters and Saruzu Quartet brings knife-edge Flamenco, Tango and gypsy jazz improvisations

The National is aware and regretful that the Colonial Ball will not be able to be



accommodated in the Coorong this year. It will continue to feature strongly on the agenda in 2011. The National is facing a range of obstacles this year, not least of which is the deteriorating dance floor in the Coorong, the temporary closure for renovation of the Albert Hall, which was to be an alternative venue, as well as the need to utilise every square metre of seated venue space in the evenings. The growing attendance at the festival, especially on Saturday evening has presented challenges in terms of venue space that we hope will be addressed by the EPIC management in the coming years.

When a potential 12,000 crowd come through the gate on a Saturday night, the larger venue seating space is at an absolute premium. Each year in the dedicated dance space in the Mallee, where the National has invested in a \$20,000 dance floor, the program can be rotated between English Colonial, Irish and Scottish. With the lovely space in the Albert Hall venue renovated, this will provide a good Colonial dance space in the future.

Dance floor deterioration is also a significant factor. The National are the sole users of the Coorong dance floor there at EPIC, which is under cover during other show usage during the year. So it is not immediately obvious just how much the floor has deteriorated and is in need of serious repair before it is safe for dance. This is a very expensive undertaking and our current use does not justify the cost to EPIC or ourselves at this stage. The floor is temporarily made good each year and each year there are complaints about the condition of it, so the National will need to revisit the use of the floor. I have played music for the Colonial Dancers in Brisbane for nearly 10 years and am aware of how much pleasure the dancers take from the Playford and variety of other English sets, so please rest assured that we understand that the ball is sorely missed in this particular venue and we fully intend to accommodate it in the festival in the future.

Whilst there are many areas of specialist interest at the festival, I should add that general decisions are not taken lightly and are always made with the good of the greater festival community in mind. We are well aware that this occasionally impacts on specific groups and hope you will understand that there is absolutely no prejudice or special treatment and that the National will make every effort to accommodate everyone's needs and interests and ensure avenues are open for ongoing dialogue.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the incredible dedication and input of all the volunteers on the festival, especially the many volunteer coordinators who gathered for our Coordinators Meeting last Saturday at Epic. I have not encountered this degree of contribution of time and dedicated knowledge and energy at any event. It also feels like an extended family of people who love the event and who go back many years. I am aware of your past contribution and I hope I can return your dedication by serving the event and the organisation as well you all have.

The festival will always welcome feedback from our community, constructive criticism and especially good ideas that we can accommodate within our budget.



We are one of the few major festivals that do not rely on extensive commercial sponsorship and large government grants.

Many thanks to the NFF Board and the rest of the NFF staff team for making me so welcome and for their kind help in getting me settled.

I hope I get a chance to talk to as many of you as possible and I look forward to working with you all. Here's to another great National in 2010.

Best wishes

Sebastian