

Artistic Director Report Cygnet FF 2024

I received a message after the festival stating, “best festival yet; I’m calling it!” -let’s take their word for it!!

This is only our second ‘full festival’ post the closures and cancellations during COVID, and it now certainly feels as if we are back in the swing of things.

We already had a great programme lined up, when informed that our funding application to arts Tasmania had been successful. This allowed us, (in addition to our great relief in terms of the budget) to increase our marketing a little and also to employ extras such as the Auslan interpreters and some minor improvements to our “Festival Green” space.

Thursday night of the festival not saw not only what is becoming a festival tradition with the feast (this time with an Italian theme), but also a sublime concert at the beautiful Nolan Gallery at MONA; thanks to the generous sponsorship from Mona of the venue and staff for the evening. This event featured a Swedish folk/classical Trio, Northern Resonance, the brilliant Irish singer songwriter Clare Sands with support from her sister Lainey, and the inimitable Shakuhachi player, Riley Lee.

So, already off to a good start, the weekend followed with three masterclasses, and we then returned to our afternoon concert at SETAC and the Welcome Ceremony which included a traditional smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country in addition to some great tasters of the acts in store for the weekend.

For the first time, the festival choir, run by Gina Williams and Guy Ghouse rehearsed at SETAC: and the extraordinary attendance of those wanting to learn songs in Noongar had us scrambling to print out extra song sheets and find shade for the well-over 100 participants!

We are truly humbled by the calibre and diversity of artists that apply to play for our festival, and so the weekend saw an extraordinary range of concerts, themed shows, poetry, panels, debates, workshops, dances, sessions and more! It’s again wonderful to see Bob Brown’s Earth Celebration, and always, the ‘round robin’ style events continue to draw appreciative audiences and on occasion, creating some wonderful, spontaneous collaborations. Also popular are the special themed performances; An enormous amount of work goes into these presentations and it’s wonderful to see our audiences respond so enthusiastically.

As well as the festival choir, we had a brilliant festival orchestra coordinated by Dave McNamara, and Rose Wilson brought together a great team of singers to welcome (with the orchestra) the Pilgrims to St James on the Sunday afternoon.

Also deserving of special mention are the Youth Events and showcases. While the youth blackboard in Loongana Park has been a decades long event, the more recent

Youth Showcase concert assisted by Folk alliance Australia, pulls together both the winning recipients from the blackboard event and other young artists from around the state. For the first time, we were able to feature young musicians from Hobart Senior College and I hope that other schools may encourage their young musicians to attend. The future of folk music is certainly in good hands, and the festival will continue to try to give opportunities for these young musicians to showcase and learn from one-another and from their elders.

I am grateful for our amazing team. Bridget, our coordinator (without whom I would seriously falter, and whom I absolutely love working with), and all the CFF committee; an extraordinary group of volunteers who make this event happen. Anne Foale as president has steered us so well and while she is stepping down from the role, we're not yet prepared to let her leave the team!

A thousand thanks to Sue Lehtonen our performer services coordinator, who ensures that all the performers have somewhere to sleep at night, get to where they need to be and so many other small but essential details. Chris Ellis makes the database not only operational, but legible to those of us less technically minded!
Robin Janus for years has managed a crew of brilliant, hardworking and loyal sound engineers who he inspires give their all year after year.

Rachel Meyers and Michael Bentley have been (and will hopefully continue to be, with the addition of Montz Matsumoto) my co-selectors for the programming. I'm very grateful for their care and attention to detail that goes into this.

We're all aware that festivals currently exist in a very precarious space, but Cygnet Folk Festival has been responsibly managed by current and prior committees, and while we are facing many of the same challenges (especially in terms of increasing costs) as other events, I feel we're going into our 2025 festival feeling positive and with the support of some extraordinary people and local organisations.

With thanks



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erin Collins', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Erin Collins
Artistic Director
Cygnet Folk Festival