

Presidents Report for Huon Folk Inc [Cygnet Folk Festival] at AGM 2023/24

The 2024 Cygnet Folk Festival brought us all together once again in our magical part of the world to share music, dance, spoken word and culture from all over the globe. We were blessed with perfect weather – combine this with diversity of music and amazing individuals and bands, and a rich program that brought together likely and unlikely partners on stages big and small to fuel our senses and inspire joy in hearts and minds – and we get what we have come to expect from CFF - a small festival that soars above what one could realistically expect from a low budget, volunteer dependent, small town festival. The artistic offerings once again brought such diversity to Cygnet and the Huon Valley, so many from just here, in this talented State, loads from the big island and then gems from Ireland, Scotland and other parts of the UK as well as Sweden, the USA and the Solomon Islands. Cygnet Folk Festival is flying in the face of the current and worrying trend of festivals finding themselves no longer able to continue. That is not to say that it is easily done, nor that our festival is without challenges. However, I believe that our continuation is affirmation of the Committee's persistent focus on the fiscal realities and the importance of sustainability; in multiple ways – of our festival, our community and our planet.

The Festival Committee changed a little again this year: Sally Port our secretary and long-time retired from the committee. Sally has been an amazing contributor to the festival and she will continue to contribute in many ways. She was the leader of the décor team, as well as being the magic behind and hard work under pinning the Festival Feast from its inception, we owe her such a debt of gratitude. This year also Ray Mainbridge stepped down for a year to attend to many family demands and it is a pleasure to welcome him back to the table. New committee members were Jo Matthews, Montz Matsumoto, Kym Foley and Kate Cole – Kate subsequently resigned in June.

Michael Russell continued in the role of Vice President and Michael Bently took on the Secretary role and Robert Alcock became Treasurer whilst I, Anne Foale agreed to continue in the role of President for one more year. Ray Mainsbridge although not active on the committee for this year continued as our Public Officer and provided legal support if needed. In addition to those just mentioned, continuing on the committee were Michael Thomsen and Alice Toner-Brown for the second year of their terms and Chris Ellis was re-elected for another two year term on the committee.

Festival patrons who came on board for 2024 were Rosemary Briggs, Paul Thomas/Bob Brown, Jane Tolman and Sarah Dempsey.

The committee and the Finance and Sponsorship sub-committee again worked diligently at monitoring and seeking to improve the Festival's financial bottom line. This of course could not be done without our excellent staff, Bridget Binnie and Erin Collins, who do the heavy lifting; to this end we are delighted that through their successful grant writing the Festival secured a much needed \$72,000 grant in December that was instrumental in making the 2024 festival financially successful.

Speaking of financial viability – we could not exist and thrive without our loyal sponsors and again I thank, Willie Smiths, Hobart Brewing Company, TPR Realty, The Southern Swan, Huon Valley Financial Services [Bendigo], Huon Valley Council [in kind] and new sponsors this year, The Lost Captain and Knocklofty Distillery. We also appreciate the support from Franklin MPs, David O’Byrne and Rosalie Woodruff.

This year we continued the Dr Dennis Dubetz, Cygnet Folk Festival Awards made possible by the generous bequest from the family of Dr Dennis Dubetz who passed away in 2021. Dr Dubetz was a long-time supporter and lover of the festival and had been a GP in Cygnet for many years after coming to Tasmania from Canada via Queensland. This year’s Awards went to a young and upcoming local musicians LJ and Lucy and the Award to a musician who had travelled from far afield went to Clare Sands from Ireland. Both Awards are to the value of \$1000. The bequest will continue to cover Awards for a further three years.

A new Festival experience was added this year as an optional extra – and a very helpful source of extra revenue – that was the Night in the Nolan. The Nolan Gallery at MONA being very generously subsidised to us by MONA and allowing us to showcase three of our outstanding artists on the Thursday evening prior to the Festival proper. The only problem with this new event was that it had to because of logistics compete with the Festival Feast which also on the same night in Cygnet. But in reality that was not such a problem, perhaps it could be viewed as just a preparation for the reality of CFF – there are many, many choices to be made between equally fabulous alternatives all through the weekend.

Our crew, contract volunteers and regular volunteers are the back bone that keeps the festival viable over so many years and I thank them all most sincerely. I note particularly our meticulous book keeper Christine Chivassa, our skilful data base manager Chris Ellis and the inimitable Sue Lehtonen our Performer Services manager. I would also like to acknowledge that the role of St James Catholic College in making the festival possible in its current format, ie by generously allowing for the extensive use of their College facilities, cannot be underestimated. It is important to recognise that this contribution is not always simple or easy for the College which has to manage many behind the scenes school operational projects and routines around the Festival requirements. That they do so with equanimity and generosity is something which should publicly acknowledged by the Festival committees moving forward.

It is the collective goodwill, energy and passion of a diverse collaboration of so many, paid and unpaid, sponsors and supporters, patrons and punters, musicians and artists, stall holders and buskers, families and singles, visitors and locals that make the Cygnet Folk Festival successful now and we fervently hope successful and sustainable into the future. Please accept as given my heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed in varied ways big and small, over many years, or just occasionally, to the success of this festival enterprise; in these challenging times may we buck the trend and continue not just to survive but to thrive, and inspire, with music and celebration.

It has been my privilege and pleasure to have occupied the President’s role in Huon Folk Inc since March 2018, when I stepped into the chair for a year to give the incumbent a necessary break to focus on other matters. It seems I have a tendency to stay around! But it is now time to step aside for others to step up. I am very happy to continue working on the

committee for another year or two but am pleased to hand on the chair. The past 6 years have been somewhat of a rollercoaster but in a good way - Festival has marked a significant milestone, made some changes and developed and evolved and thankfully survived COVID .. so far. I have worked for essentially all of that time with Bridget as Coordinator and Erin as Artistic Director and I could have asked for a more dedicated, loyal, talented, resourceful, collaborative, caring, competent, knowledgeable and genuinely friendly pair of colleagues to work alongside. Technically we as the committee as their employees but it does not feel like that it feels like we are all part of the same team – albeit that they work much harder!

The committees have changed and evolved, all for good, as some have needed to step back there was always someone new and amazing to step forward. We have added things to the Festival in my time, and we have taken over things such as the stalls/market and the bars, we have refined and reconfigured some aspects, retuned and expanded others in a contained way – overall I am saying the CFF is never going to be nor ever was a static beast but it has remain true to its core purpose of producing an excellent Folk Music Festival and underpinned it with values of community and diversity, sustainability and excellence and celebration. I take pride that in my time in the Chair, we have engaged the community, recognised the need for sustainability and not aimed for growth at the cost of what the local community can embrace, we have evolved and maintained our high quality benchmarks of musicians and artists and we have reached out more broadly for ethical local sponsorship and merchandising and we have created a range of membership options.

Thank you to the wonderful committees with whom I have worked and the 1000s of volunteers with whom I have crossed paths in this beautiful ride.

Anne Foale
President
15.4.2024