



The Folk Federation of NSW

Promoting Folk Music and the Related Arts in NSW and Beyond

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2020 – 2021 YEAR

What a year! 2020/21 has been a challenging one, not just for the Folk Federation of NSW but for the whole of our folk sector. When COVID forced everything to lock down at the beginning of 2020 the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic were difficult to imagine. Optimistically, there was an expectation that by mid-2021 things would start to return to normal and, following our last AGM to some extent things did begin to open up. Our core committee was returned save for Jane Brownlee who stood down due to heavy work commitments and we welcomed back Christine Wheeler and Andy Busuttil plus a new member, Craig Sinclair.

The 20/21 committee's first activity was a COVID regulated End of Year Folk Bash last December. Once again thanks must go to Margaret Walters for curating this event and to Craig Sinclair for arranging the live stream component making it accessible to members around the state. At that event we took the opportunity to acknowledge our 50th year and some of FolkFed's founding members including Danny Watson, Colleen Z Burke, Bernard Bolan and Warren Fahey were invited to share their recollections. Two long serving members were also honoured with Lifetime Membership of the Folk Federation. Coral Vorbach was recognised for her many years of devoted service as the Editor of Cornstalk and Bruce Cameron for his contribution in many roles on the Committee and for his long dedication to the organisation. Congratulations go to both these worthy recipients.

Heading into the new year our committee enthusiastically threw itself into organising the 2021 Sydney Folk Festival which is now earmarked as the FolkFed's flagship event. However, any return to a sense of normality proved to be short lived. Just as the first round of SFF tickets went on sale and we began to announce the artists and the program, including an overdue celebration of the FolkFed's 50th Anniversary to be curated by Warren Fahey, NSW entered into another lockdown. Our Sydney Folk Festival committee hung on in the hope of being able to run a festival in 2021. While initially we had envisaged a postponement until later in the year sadly, with the way the situation has developed, not only in NSW but across the Eastern States with lockdowns being extended and, even with higher rates of vaccination promised, it is now not a practical option to stage the event. Over these past few months of uncertainty FolkFed has, I am pleased to report continued an excellent relationship with the City of Sydney, our festival's significant funding partner. Their support for the festival has been unwavering and I must thank Terry Clinton who has been the FolkFed's main liaison with City personnel in maintaining this important partnership.

Apart from the festival which, despite not going ahead, occupied much of our time, the committee also undertook a review of the Folk Federation's Strategic Plan. While this has been a work in progress we are looking to have an updated plan ready by the end of December this year. This is intended to be a living document and a guide for the Folk Federation over the next three years to position the organisation to better respond to, support and lead our folk communities into the future.

Despite the impact of COVID on our festival plans and the stop start nature of life in general, FolkFedNSW went ahead with its Young Folk Artists of the Year Awards with Craig Sinclair replacing Jane Brownlee as the Young Folk Awards Co-ordinator. With a minor rejigging of the age categories, we were delighted to announce the 2021 recipients in August. South Coast

singer-songwriter Bodhi Turner received the Under 21yrs Senior Award and the recipient of the Under 16yrs Junior category was Sydney-based fiddler Charlie Gastineau-Hills. While performing opportunities are currently limited due to COVID restrictions we look forward to working with these exciting young talents over the coming year.

With the review of the Strategic Plan firmly in focus one thing that has occupied the committee over the past year has been how we can best engage and connect more effectively with our members, especially since the retirement of our printed Cornstalk publication. To this end we have commissioned an upgrade of the Folk Federation website which we believe will better serve the needs of both existing and potential members. This will include an overhaul of the membership portal, a more user-friendly interface for members using the News, Events and FolkMart platforms and a Folk Directory making it easy for visitors to our site to search for performers, folk clubs, events and festivals. We are also exploring how we might incorporate an online Cornstalk presence. This upgrade will take place between now and the end of the year.

One of the regular communications that has continued throughout these up and the down times of the current COVID climate has been our weekly online FolkMail newsletter. I would especially like to thank both Julie Bishop and Wayne Richmond for their sterling effort in getting this out each week, "rain, hail or shine" as it were, to keep our folk community informed with all the current news and folk happenings. FolkMail has been our one constant in a year of unpredictability.

A major goal, and a challenge for the Folk Federation in this current climate where Coronavirus has made us rethink about the way we do things, is how we can engage with the folk sector to help build stronger, more resilient folk music networks that support our artists and our communities in general. To this end we have recently formed a sub-committee consisting of Craig Sinclair, Andy Busuttil, Russell Neal, Alex Bishop and I to look into living with COVID and live music events in the short term and, what a longer-term future for live folk music in specifically, but not limited to NSW might look like. To date we have met once and reported back to the main group with the focus being on how to re-evaluate and reinvent the way we approach live music in order to sustain our sector. It is important that the Folk Federation continues to find ways to grow its profile and its reach throughout the folk sector so it can play its part in supporting our folk communities. This will be an ongoing priority over the next months and has already sparked some interesting dialogue from within the greater committee.

It is a privilege to be part of the Folk Federation of NSW and an absolute pleasure to work with my fellow committee members towards this end. Each of us brings special knowledge and skills that enhance the group and we have been, I think a great team. I am especially grateful for the wise heads of those who have been long serving members of this committee and would especially like to thank two people who are often the unsung heroes of organisations like ours. Our secretary Pam Davis who has been a wonderful support ensuring our meetings are well organised and minuted and maintaining effective communication and correspondence and, our treasurer Dallas Baxter who quietly manages the finances, membership subscriptions, deals with the auditor and ensures we comply with all the requirements of a registered charity. And finally, I'd like to end by thanking all our committee for their unity and dedication and for their wise contributions to our discussions throughout the year.

Pam Merrigan