



Folk Federation of NSW

President's Report Nov 2021-Oct 2022

The Folk Federation of NSW acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout our state of NSW and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to Elders past and present.

We especially respect the role that music and songlines play and continue to play in the continuation of First Nation's culture.

ABOUT FolkFedNSW

The Folk Federation of NSW Inc. (FolkFedNSW) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and a peak body in NSW actively championing folk music and the folk arts. It is also a registered charity. FolkFedNSW's financial year runs from May 1 – April 30 while its operational year is from November 1 – October 31.

FolkFedNSW supports and represents all aspects of the NSW folk sector including, but not limited to, musicians, venues, folk organisations and community groups and, folk arts enthusiasts of all ages and interests. FolkFedNSW also provides advocacy on behalf of the folk sector.

FolkFedNSW is overseen by a volunteer committee made up of up to 12 members at any time and elected by its membership. It is a "hands-on", skills-based committee where each member of the team contributes to furthering the organisation's purpose.

From the President

The past year has been both a challenging and a productive one for FolkFedNSW. While the impacts of COVID-19 still hang over us there is a growing sense that finally we are seeing a light through the COVID fog. Festivals and gigs are happening, choirs are singing, dancers are dancing, and music sessions have started up again. However patchy, however slow, it seems, fingers, toes and everything else crossed, we are on the road to recovery. Whether things will return to the way they were pre-Covid is anyone's guess, but I suspect not and that we will need to develop new strategies to operate in the post-pandemic world.

It always feels strange to be saying we began the year with our *End of Year Folk Bash* however, this event is always first on the calendar as our operational year commences in November. With COVID plans in place we forged ahead with the 2021 event, once again under the capable direction of Margaret Walters. The Folk Bash was also an opportunity to showcase our 2021 Young Folk Artists of the Year. Charlie Gastneau-Hills (under 16) and Bodhi Turner (under 21) had missed out earlier in the year due to interruptions caused by COVID so it was important to recognise both before the next round of Awards opened in 2022. It was a packed program and a very successful afternoon and I'd like to thank Margaret for once again taking on the organisation of this event and for the range of knowledge she brings to our committee.

In last year's report I announced that we had commissioned an upgrade of the Folk Federation website which we believed would better serve the needs of both our existing and potential members. This took a little longer than expected but I am pleased to let you know that the new look site was launched in April this year. After a slow start while we ironed out some of

the bugs I am pleased to report that interactive engagement is increasing and the Folk Directory is growing. If you haven't had an opportunity to check out the website I recommend you do so soon and start contributing and interacting with our community.

One of FolkFedNSW's major initiatives is our Young Folk Artists of the Year Awards and this has continued successfully in 2022 under the direction of our youth co-ordinators, Craig Sinclair and Alex Bishop. I thank them both for their continued work with this program, especially Craig who took on more of the activities associated with this program as Alex became tied up with other FolkFed matters. Two awards were offered in 2022 with a slight tweaking of the age categories. Emma Foote, a fifteen-year-old violinist from Pambula on the South Coast of NSW received the under 19yrs award and singer / guitarist Sean Cooper from Allambie Heights NSW the under 25yrs award. FolkFedNSW is committed to this program and to raising the profile of folk music within a younger cohort. To this end we are looking to expand the program over the coming year and invite your ideas regarding youth activities. We'd also like to hear from you if you are interested in becoming a Youth Program sponsor. At this point I should thank Andy Busuttil and Blue Mountains Sound for sponsoring the recording component of the Awards. I'd also like to let you know, particularly for anyone who has kindly donated to the Folk Federation's tax deductible Public Fund that some of these funds have been directed towards supporting our Youth Program which we believe is a valuable investment in the future of our folk sector.

FolkFedNSW's second major undertaking occurred in August. This was the much-anticipated return of the Sydney Folk Festival. After a two-year COVID enforced hiatus the 2022 festival was a challenge especially with the continued presence and impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour regarding live music events. With two years of lockdowns and cancellations it was also difficult to consolidate on the success of the 2019 festival, especially since we had to move the event's focus from Pitt Street to Surry Hills due to venue availability. Much of the 2022 program was carried over from our cancelled 2021 event and Alex Bishop bravely took on the role of Operations and Production Manager putting together an excellent team of people who did a fantastic job pulling it all together. I should also mention Russell Neill who did a lot of leg work around Surry Hills pre-festival and Terry Clinton who managed our City of Sydney grant from the application process to implementation and acquittal. In fact, everyone from the festival committee to the volunteers and our contracted technical providers are to be congratulated for making it happen. Unfortunately, the festival didn't quite achieve a break-even outcome and took a small financial hit. We had foreseen this might be the case but went ahead anyway not wanting to cancel for a second year. In terms of its creative, cultural and community impact the festival was however highly successful. Festival audiences, volunteers and performers were genuinely pleased to be connecting, mixing and enjoying the festival atmosphere and the general feeling was, *it's good to be back!* We lost a few acts due to COVID, some people purchased tickets and then chose not to attend, some didn't purchase tickets at all and, while all that was disappointing, a wonderful spirit of community and coming together prevailed and that was pure magic.

One of the longer-term projects our committee has been working on is the development and implementation of a new Strategic Plan. Some of you may recall that I referred to this in my report last year with an expectation to have it in place for the beginning of this year. Well, it really has been a work-in-progress but I am pleased to say that finally we have one and it is now on the website for anyone interested to view. I reiterate what I said last year that it is intended to be a living document and a road map for the Folk Federation over the next two

years to guide us in how we respond to, support and lead our folk communities into the future.

A key element of our new Strategic Plan is advocacy on behalf of the diverse community that makes up our NSW folk music and arts sector. To this end, when the Federal Government called for submissions to inform a new National Cultural Policy we saw a response to this as an important opportunity to represent our sector. The paper, submitted by FolkFedNSW in August was, for the most part, driven and put together by Christine Wheeler and I would like to thank her for this valuable contribution. This document is also now available to view on the FFNSW website.

For the first time since I have been President the FFNSW committee has had a full complement as we welcomed two new members Kirsten Hulse and Cathy Rytmeister. Kirsten is from Braidwood and gave FolkFed not only a third non-Sydney member as we seek to expand our representation to other parts of NSW but also a younger voice. Cathy of course has a long history with the folk sector and brought a range of experience to our committee. Our 2021/22 committee really has been a great group to be part of and I thank everyone for their time and valued contributions throughout the year.

I am however sad to say that we are farewelling one of our long-serving committee members. Pam Davis has given what can only be described as an above and way beyond commitment to FolkFedNSW. She has been on the committee for 16 years and over that time has served as both President and Secretary, the role she currently holds. When I was approached in 2019 to take on the role of President, I said that I would only accept if Pam Davis stayed on for another year as Secretary. She stayed on for three and I have been very fortunate to have had her advice and support over those three years. I'm sure you will all join with me in wishing her well. I will miss our phone chats and her wise words. I am however pleased to say that Pam is not totally casting us adrift and will stay on in an ex-officio capacity while the new secretary settles in.

Another committee member who I would especially like to thank is our Treasurer Dallas Baxter who is not quite leaving us just yet though I believe, is hoping to find a replacement in the coming year. The more I work with Dallas the more I realise just how much organisational knowledge she holds and how meticulous she is in the execution of the treasurer's role. So Dallas, thank you.

Reflecting on the year, it has I believe, been a successful one for FolkFedNSW and, as we begin the rebuilding process after the challenges thrown up by COVID-19, we are in a strong position as we move into the 2022-23 year. Our membership is looking solid and growing, lots of renewals, some engaging for the first time, others reconnecting after a lapse. Our committee has worked as an effective team and, while there is plenty to keep us busy, much of what we have achieved in the past year has certainly laid the groundwork for realising our strategic vision: to support and champion folk music and the folk arts in NSW.

My final words are to our membership. You are at the heart of what we do and why we do it. Thank you to those of you who keep returning each year and welcome to our new members. What we are able to achieve is made possible because of your support and we look forward to that continuing into to coming year as we work towards ensuring a thriving, inclusive and sustainable folk music and arts sector.

Pam Merrigan
President, Folk Federation of NSW