

*The future can be influenced  
by artists working with  
community who share a vision  
and have the courage and  
determination to pursue it.*

Joise Black OAM, Secretary, Corangamite Arts Inc.



**The A-maze-ing Labyrinth** is a portable, reinventable, sculptural installation, which drew on the expertise of over 250 local residents in Mallacoota, Victoria.

**Natimuk Frinj Festival** relies on the talents of a strong arts community to produce a serious fringe festival in the small regional town of Natimuk, Victoria.

**Choral Island** involved over 400 people from choirs and vocal groups across Tasmania performing to an audience of 3000 at the Port Arthur Historic Site.

**Bundaleer Weekend** provides a unique experience for audiences and a chance for the community to tell others about Australia's first plantation forest in Jamestown, South Australia.

**Alice Springs Beanie Festival** started as a community development project to celebrate Indigenous fibre arts, and is now a community festival attracting fibre artists from across the country.

**Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion** in Victoria inspired young emerging artists and communities to create a fringe festival in their town and to take part in the Melbourne Fringe Fashion Event.

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Artists and communities

# The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth

## Mallacoota Arts Festival

In the small town of Mallacoota, East Gippsland artist Catherine Larkins, assisted by a volunteer squad of 250 people—no less than a quarter of the town's permanent residents—constructed an extraordinary work of art: a very large, portable installation of 18 hexagonal rooms. Made of rip-stop nylon, bamboo and steel, the labyrinth was a beautiful and adaptable installation. With the enthusiastic participation of 20 Mallacoota organisations, the rooms of the labyrinth also became a series of marvellous art galleries celebrating local creativity.

The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth was Catherine Larkins' ambitious response to the theme of Mallacoota's 22nd Arts Festival called 'Collide-A-Scope: Choice, Chance and Change'. But her vision could only be realised with the technical and creative contribution of dozens of residents of this tiny Victorian coastal town. Catherine's close association with the Mallacoota community on other challenging community arts projects over 15 years meant she could count on this support.



Catherine conceptualised and designed the structure so that it could easily be dismantled and reassembled in various configurations and in many locations. Her first point of inspiration was the hexagon, which is the basis for the infinite possibilities of patterns multiplying and reforming through the lens of a kaleidoscope. Within the constraints of a tight budget, a structure of bamboo poles and metal brackets was created supporting a skin of rip-

stop nylon material. The structure's outer ring of 12 hexagons was 2 metres high and stepped up to a higher, inner ring of six hexagons that was 3 metres high, on top of which sat three Russian onion domes, each one adding another 3 metres.

Locals stepped forward in droves to construct, assemble and embellish The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth. A Swiss silver and goldsmith scaled-up the dome pattern from models to actual dimensions, working with a local welder. Patchworkers configured and sewed the intricate designs covering the six panels of each dome. Kite makers advised on the rip-stop nylon material. A retired upholsterer sewed up the sleeves in his backyard shed, while also transferring skills in cutting, measuring and constructing to his assistants. Fishermen and others provided advice about fine stainless steel cabling to counteract wind and stress factors. The State Emergency Services (SES) and a local farmer helped to install the structure on the local oval.

The finished structure was lavishly decorated with highly-coloured patchwork designs with eclectic inspiration drawn from Middle Eastern, Russian and Indian aesthetics. Locals compared it to a beehive, a sophisticated patchworker's block and a Star of David.

Once funding was sourced, Catherine began a residency at a local community centre where she consulted closely with the 20 community groups (double the expected number) that registered interest in participating. She



Top: The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth

Above: Community assembling The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth, Mallacoota Festival 2002

Right: Mallacoota SES hexagon interior designed by SES leader Hans Van Der Sant for The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth, Mallacoota Festival 2002

Photography: Catherine Larkins



emphasised that each group needed to conceive and design an exciting contemporary visual arts environment around the theme of choice, chance and change for the labyrinth.

*'A truly wondrous and amazing entwining of many, many individual's creativity and love.'*

Eighteen hexagonal spatial environments were designed and installed by 18 Mallacoota organisations and individuals, including: Coast Action, District Health, Friends of 'Coota, Mallacoota P-12 College, Youth Festival, Mallacoota Reconciliation Group, visual arts students in the TAFE Diploma of Visual Arts course, the kindergarten, the local FM radio station, the Surfboard Riders Club, Kim Gordon and the Mallacoota Patchworkers, and the Gabo Island lighthouse keeper.

One constraint was that most hexagons were without ceilings and open to weather, so people had to be very inventive in their use of fabrics and materials. The local radio station glued old vinyl records and CDs into a mosaic on the floor of one hexagon. The lighthouse keeper constructed a complex assemblage based on a traditional compass shape and made from materials found on Gabo Island, including animal skeletons and flotsam.

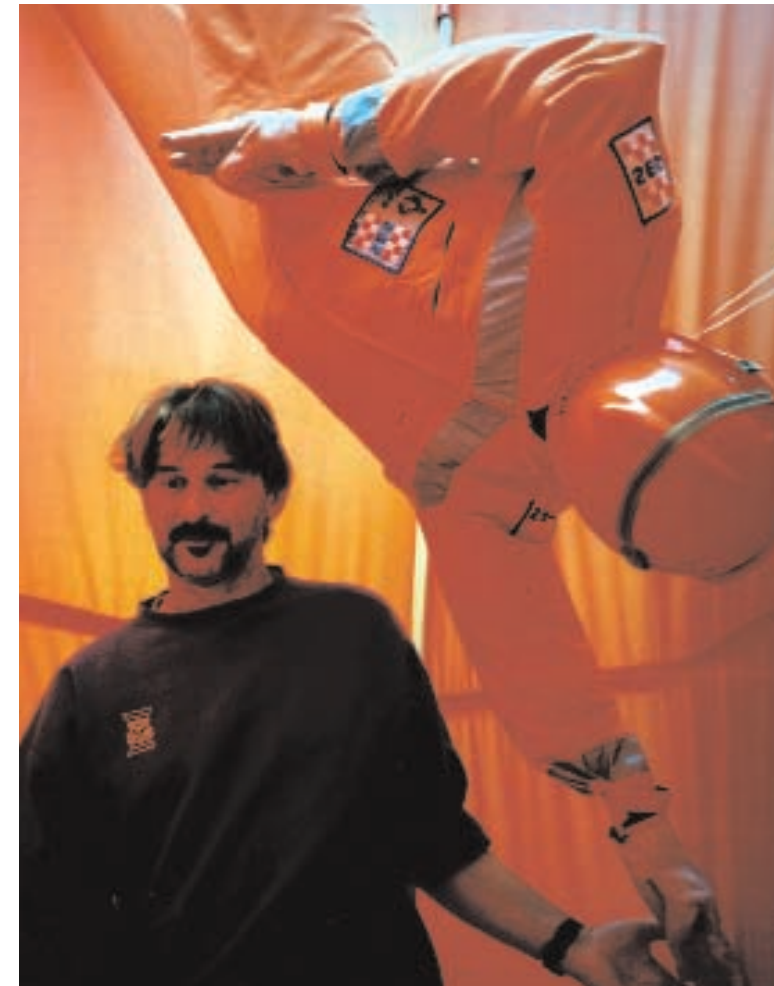
On opening day of the Mallacoota Arts Festival, long queues formed outside The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth. Visitors

were ushered into the labyrinth in groups of 15. By the end of one Easter four-day weekend, 2000 people, having paid their gold entry coin, had explored the maze of colourful rooms.

'A truly wondrous and amazing entwining of many, many individual's creativity and love. It's an inspiration. I am privileged to have been through it. Catherine Larkins' vision is a fabulous asset to this Festival,' wrote Susan Purdy in the visitors' book. 'What a maze! Fantastic. I loved the textures, concepts and colours,' wrote Tina.

The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth is fully portable and can be reconfigured for and by new audiences, thus ensuring that each reinvention speaks intimately to its new hosts. Each community that hosts The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth can construct new environments in each of the 18 rooms. Since the Mallacoota Festival, the structure has been reassembled as a large circle, fencing, and as an outdoor community centre. The local community is still discussing different ways in which the labyrinth can be used and housed. Some of the issues about touring this structure, such as insurance and the equipment required for it to travel safely and securely, have not yet been resolved.

During the Festival, the exotic beauty of The A-Maze-ing Labyrinth was highlighted by its erection in the centre of Mallacoota next to one of the town's heritage Mallacoota gum trees. As one resident wrote, 'As a vision at night and an adventure for the day, A-Maze-ing Labyrinth is magic. Truly inspired.'



Funding/support: Arts Victoria, Mallacoota Arts Council, East Gippsland Institute of TAFE, with in-kind support from the Mallacoota community

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# Natimuk Frinj Festival

## The Arapiles Community Theatre Group



The second 'Natimuk Frinj Festival' in 2002 was a high-quality weekend event which attracted over 2000 people to the township of Natimuk, and united a diverse population in a celebration of culture and community.

Like many regional Australian towns, Natimuk, in the Wimmera region of Victoria, is changing. Traditional farming and business people share their community with a recent influx of artists, performers and dedicated rock climbers attracted to the adjacent Mount Arapiles. In fact, of the town's 500 people, about 50 identify solely as rock climbers, while about 15 artists/performers are also serious rock climbers.



In 2001, one of these artist/rock climbers, Greg Pritchard, received a small grant to promote Natimuk as the fringe event to the larger, annual 'Art is...festival' at nearby Horsham. The Arapiles Community Theatre Group, which had been creating small performances in the Natimuk Soldiers Memorial Hall for many years, now hosts the festival.

The centrepiece of the second Natimuk Frinj Festival was *Colony*, a combination of aerial dance and projection by members of a local physical theatre company, Y Space. The 30 metre wheat silos were transformed through lighting, sound design and music into a performance space enabling the use of rock climbing skills in an

astonishing work of art atop the wheat storage systems. Costumed Y Space angels silently climbed the interior silo steps to the top and then flew out and over the lip. Working with the theme of 'a vigil for tolerance' the first segment of their performance enacted a clash of opposites with two angels coming together from high and low to fight each other. The next segment enacted the counterbalancing of opposites and the final section was pure joy in flight. As a local commented after this dazzling 40 minute aerial dance performance, 'This is the best thing since the tractor pull'.

*'This is the best thing since the tractor pull'.*

With the support from local state member for Lowan, Hugh Delahunty, Y Space negotiated the use of the silos with GrainCorp, who enthusiastically supported the event. The 2002 Frinj Festival Committee—Greg Pritchard, Shiree Pilkinton, Jillian Pearce, Anthony Pelchen, Mary French, Peter Hill, Jill McLeod and Lynne Quick—drew confidence in this support and a greater sense of belief in their ambitious goals.

The Frinj Festival was an inclusive process. In the lead-up to the Festival, workshops were held with the 70 pupils of Natimuk Primary School during which the children made huge angel wings attached to lengths of bamboo and

Top: Y Space Angels colonising the Natimuk GrainCorp silos, March 2002

Photo: David Fletcher, Wimmera Mail Times

Bottom: Y Space Angel, Tom Andrews performing in *Colony* Photo: courtesy of Next Wave Festival

Right: Visual projections by Ian Corcoran on Natimuk silos as part of *Colony*

Photo: courtesy of Ian Corcoran, Next Wave Festival



wrote down their ideas for an ideal world. These were transferred onto more than 100 small cloth flags like Tibetan prayer flags and strung up to carry messages of hope on the wind. At Goroke P-12 College, 45 kilometres from Natimuk, students were asked: 'If you saw an angel, what would you like to ask them?' Their responses inspired a gospel song, 'Across the Fields', about angels visiting the district during harvest time.

Performance night also included local acapella quartet, In Spiral, a choir of 30 school children and a choreographed sequence in which children manoeuvred the giant angel wings they had made during school workshops. A soundscape of children's voices talking about what was important to them was edited together with a music track and played while computer-generated landscape images were projected onto the silos. The images were produced by the Horsham Secondary College and the Horsham Camera Club.

On the night of the arts festival Natimuk experienced an unprecedented traffic jam of 1600 cars. It was bumper to bumper back to the bridge with local Lions Club members offering traffic management for people who had driven to Natimuk from all over the Wimmera region. Some even travelled the 320 kilometres from Melbourne.

Before Frinj Festival performance night 2002, a random art event saw the appearance of a giant haiku, 3.5 kilometres long inscribed on the road in lime:

dry autumn  
paddocks  
yellow  
stubble  
and blown  
dust  
a hawk  
hangs above

Instead of wearing away as expected, the haiku has endured and become something of a local tourist attraction. The Natimuk Frinj Festival is also likely to endure. Having started out as a small self-funded enterprise, in 2003 the Frinj attracted significant funding. Also in 2003, the local farming and arts communities celebrated a new level of understanding and cooperation with a 'Hay and Thespian Mardi Gras'. The ideas continue to flow in Natimuk...and also the anarchic fun, bringing together the best of the old and new in the community.



Funding/support: In 2002 Natimuk Frinj Festival was assisted by Regional Arts Victoria through the Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government initiative, VicHealth, Sidney Myer Foundation and Arts Victoria (Sharing the Festivals Fund). In-kind support was also received from Art is...festival Horsham, local community organisations and GrainCorp allowed use of the town's wheat silos.

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# Alice Springs Beanie Festival

It all started in 1996 with a 'Beanie Party'. Back then it was an opportunity to show and sell the surplus of beanies made by Indigenous women at remote crochet workshops organised by the Aboriginal Development Unit. Now the 'Alice Springs Beanie Festival' has elevated the humble beanie—that practical garment to keep the head warm during desert winters—into a fashion statement and a unique, Central Australian artform.

The 2003 Alice Springs Beanie Festival was the largest so far. Over four days, thousands of entrants from all over Australia exhibited and sold their beanies, watched fibre and textile demonstrations, participated in workshops such as Indigenous basketweaving, and enjoyed music and storytelling.

Adi Dunlop and Merran Hughes form the original core group of the Festival with Joanna Nixon and Pamela Blaydon. 'In the early years we did it all on love and elbow grease,' recalls Merran. 'As the Festival has grown larger, it has required more planning and more time from the volunteer committee. We haven't always developed policies or planned ahead, but wonderful people seem to magically appear when we need them. The Beanie Festival is run on goodwill and unlikely friendships, as much as on planning and procedures. We have learnt a lot on the run, yet the Festival always ends up happening, people always enjoy it and that is the miracle.'

The 2003 Festival opened with a fashion parade of winners in the hotly contested 'Flashiest Beanies in Australia' competition. The beanie competition aims to encourage wild and creative concepts, so beanies have been



decorated with quolls (furry, native animals), antennae and embroidered desert ranges. As well as the traditional knitted and crocheted forms, beanies have been made using felt, weaving and sewing techniques. Indigenous women in remote communities have developed a highly distinctive style of beanie, using gorgeous painted seeds and the signatory swathe of emu feathers. Competition winners in 2003 were exhibited for one month in the Araluen Galleries in Alice Springs, alongside exhibitions of works by Sidney Nolan and Albert Namatjira.

*'The Beanie Festival is run on goodwill and unlikely friendships, as much as on planning and procedures. We have learnt a lot on the run, yet the Festival always ends up happening, people always enjoy it and that is the miracle.'*

Prior to the Festival, volunteers pitch in for the herculean task of cataloguing and keeping track of the beanies. In 2003 there were 3000 to 4000 entries and items for sale. But none of this back-room work is obvious to the visitors who become engrossed in the thrill of the chase to find a perfect beanie in the Araluen Centre at the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct. Organisers have maintained the community cultural focus of the Beanie Festival, resisting any attempt to reduce it to a retail event at which stalls would be set up to sell beanies. They're intent on

Top: Panjtiti Lionel, a senior artist from Ernabella in her award winning beanie. Winner of the craziest beanie, 2002

Bottom: Alice Springs Beanie Festival competition winners 2003

Top Right: *Quoll in winter on Mt Wellington*, by Bhoomi Redpath, Tasmania. Winner of the committee prize for wonderful and unusual work 2003

Bottom Right: Tjunkaya Tapaya, a senior Ernabella artist shows some of her beanies, 2003

Photography: Merran Hughes



maintaining a playful, casual atmosphere where people are encouraged to try on lots of beanies before they make their choice. People have been seen in a cafe drinking coffee wearing a blue beanie with floppy ears which they might ultimately decide not to buy, but everyone has a great time in the process.

The Alice Springs Beanie Festival has already been used as a model for other festivals such as the Craft Council of Victoria's first scarf festival. Following contact between the Beanie Festival and the Canberra Spinners and Weavers, a bus load of women from Ernabella community in Central Australia travelled to the 'Canberra Folk Festival' to sell beanies and demonstrate traditional fibre art. Indigenous women have also exhibited their beanies at Walkabout, the World Vision gallery in Sydney.

'We would crochet hundreds of beanies each year and then still be scared there wouldn't be enough for sale. We'd be running around setting up the tables to display the beanies and cooking stews for the Aboriginal ladies who had come to town to demonstrate fibre-spinning techniques,' says Merran.

Partnerships with Aboriginal organisations Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunjatjara (NPY) Women's Council and Ernabella Arts are integral to the unique character of the Festival. Crochet workshops in remote communities are still an important part of the lead-up to the event. At the Festival itself, senior artists from remote Indigenous communities showcase traditional spinning techniques involving rubbing a simple wooden spindle on the thigh. This has become a Festival highlight and a means to



encourage cultural exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women.

'We have strong partnerships with various indigenous organisations in the area and because one of the main aims of the Festival is to promote the fibre industry of Central Australian Indigenous women, we are really open to input from these organisations,' says Merran.

Following each Beanie Festival, organisers hold a big planning meeting, open to anybody who wants to participate, at which they discuss successes, difficulties and begin to plan the next Festival. Merran: 'There are a lot of skills involved in making the Festival happen such as administration, budgeting, project managing, sourcing funds, exhibition concepts, as well as cross-cultural reconciliation. One person can't do all of that, so being able to work as a team and respect each other's skills is integral to our success. We need to have a lot of trust to nurture our ideas to fruition. The process of making a Festival is dynamic and it changes every year according to who has input and ideas. Flexibility and creative thinking are our biggest assets.'

The Alice Springs Beanie Festival celebrates traditional women's crafts—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—as well as bringing together a community of fibre artists from around Australia.

The humble crocheted or knitted beanie, celebrated, flaunted and sold in thousands during this Festival draws outsiders into Alice Springs for a unique hybrid experience, bringing art and community together.

Funding/support: The Northern Territory Arts Sponsorship Program through the Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government initiative. The Alice Springs Town Council auspices the project. Cleckheaton provides some beautiful yarns for the workshops and the famous Beanie Festival prizes. In-kind support also comes from the Araluen Centre.

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# Bundaleer Weekend

## Belalie Arts Society



The 'Bundaleer Weekend' in 2003 at Jamestown in South Australia was an opportunity for two days of immersion in fine art, music, adventure, heritage and local community culture. This community celebration was developed to increase interest and tourism in the region and protect a local environmental treasure; at the physical and emotional heart of the event was the Bundaleer Forest, Australia's first plantation of pine trees, dating back to 1876.

The Belalie Arts Society in Jamestown takes a leading role in promoting the arts in the mid-north region of the state. The Society was formed in 1985 with a view towards acquiring local art. Today, as well as being custodians of a permanent collection in the Belalie Art Gallery, the Society runs the Bundaleer Weekend, a massive cultural event involving the whole town as well as smaller communities around Jamestown. The inaugural Bundaleer Forest Concert Weekend took place in 1999; in 2003, organisers estimate 10,000 visitors came to enjoy fine art and community in a beautiful natural setting.

The planning committee for Bundaleer Weekend has various sub-committees, including artistic and production, marketing, finance/administration, environment, community relations, accommodation and food and beverage. Each sub-committee has a key worker responsible for implementing actions for their sub-group. Planning for the event starts a minimum of two years in advance, with community consultations eliciting a commitment from groups and individuals to participate, including poets, weavers, knitters, performers, artists and sporting and musical groups. In the months prior to the

weekend, various professional artists work with the community groups on skills development and participation in the artistic program.

The carnival atmosphere of Bundaleer Weekend in 2003 greeted guests as they arrived on the festival Friday. There were street stalls, street bands, a curated art exhibition in the gallery, art in the street, guided walks through surrounding country, and gourmet dining.

*'A weekend of music, arts, good food and good company at every turn in the forest'*

On Saturday afternoon hundreds of local school children paraded through the forest, carrying banners and flags, and performing on wacky musical instruments made in community and school workshops. The musical procession led the crowd towards an eccentric sculpted musical instrument made by artists and other locals. The unveiling of this 7-metre-high sculpture in the forest was followed by a high-energy performance by Cirkidz, the South Australian circus/theatre company of young performers.

On Saturday evening, Bundaleer Forest Amphitheatre hosted a twilight concert presenting artists of international stature, such as opera singers Yvonne Kenny AM, Elizabeth Campbell and tenor David Hamilton. They performed with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra,

Above: Title: *Talking Head* Actor: Astrid Pill  
Right: Title: *Bird of Light* Mandala. Artist: Evette Sunset, with Jamestown community  
Photography: Clive Palmer Photography, Jamestown



conducted by Nicholas Milton, in the world premiere of *Towards Unlit Skies*. This commissioned choral work was composed by a young South Australian, Natalie Williams, with a libretto written by Adelaide director and composer Pat Rix and poet Kim Mann, in collaboration with two local writers groups and two groups of local school students. The performance was supported by a regional choir (including children) and the renowned Tutti Ensemble Holdfast Choir. Music continued late into the night with FRUIT and The Borderers getting everyone up on their feet. On Sunday the musical feast rolled on with the Australian String Quartet, Little Black Dress, R@que and Clarinet Capers.

A Sunday afternoon highlight was the opportunity for visitors to be surprised, amazed and delighted as they walked through Bundaleer Forest by the discovery of more than 30 performances of music, poetry, theatre, acrobatics, sport and dance. Two established, signposted Bundaleer Forest walks became pathways to the outrageous, the magical or whimsical.

Roz Hervey, artistic director of Bundaleer Weekend Forest Walks, choreographed this event. Some of the delights discovered by walkers were: Adelaide actress Astrid Pill, apparently buried up to her neck, improvising songs or stories; aerial dancers towering above the ground in massive gum trees; opera singers on swings; fencers duelling with violin accompaniment; a music-box ballerina on a rotating musical seat; two local artists painting a canvas hung between trees; a tango demonstration with opportunities for tango classes on a rostrum; and Ngadjuri Aboriginal storytellers. A line of seats at the top of Panoramic

Walk comforted the weary who could rest their feet, sip iced tea, take in the view, and enjoy a gentle massage while being soothed by the sounds of a heavenly harp.

The large-scale theatricality of this event depended upon the professionalism of the artists and particularly their improvisational skills, since a full dress rehearsal was out of the question. Many practical solutions needed to be found by organisers to sustain lengthy performances by artists in outdoor environments. One was solved by giving each artist a packaged gourmet lunch. The audience on the other hand revelled in their complete freedom to listen, observe and see performances from many angles. 'A weekend of music, arts, good food and good company at every turn in the forest,' said Jane Brummitt. 'We brought Canadian visitors with us who were very impressed and this made us feel very proud of SA's country creativity.'

Local involvement and participation in this event has expanded over the years as the communities become more confident about being involved artistically as well as organisationally. Local artworker Kate Jenkins says community members surprised themselves. 'They're very skilled and with the help of facilitating artists, can make miracles happen.'

Bundaleer Weekend has evolved into a biennial event. The next one is scheduled for March 2005.



Funding/support: Country Arts SA through the Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government initiative, Arts SA, Festivals Australia, Tourism SA, Environment Protection Authority SA, Forestry SA, local council and private businesses.

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# Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion

## Regional Arts Victoria and the Melbourne Fringe Festival

When Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) and the 'Melbourne Fringe Festival' wanted to appeal to the creativity and energy of young people in the region, Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion was the answer. Across Victoria, over a three month period in 2002, hundreds of people produced inventive, beautiful and provocative fashion/wearable-art garments.

Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion was created in response to a felt need. Some established regional arts groups had noted a decline in participation by the younger generation. And some regional artists felt that their own local communities were not fully tapping into their professional skills. The challenge was to create a project through which regional artists could take a lead in their communities; by which art could be seen as something more intrinsic to community culture than simply a weekend elective, and which would encourage participation by young people.

Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion took shape as a multi-faceted arts project. It would provide a structured mentorship program through which experienced regional artists could pass on their skills to young emerging artists. Participation by a wide range of community members, especially young people, would be encouraged. It would create links between regional communities and the Melbourne Fringe Festival (a major cultural event for young artists and young audiences). And four regional communities would participate in the Melbourne Fringe Festival.



First there were calls for expressions of interest, followed by a series of six information sessions organised by RAV with arts and community groups across the state. This helped organisers to refine the project. Following submissions, the four selected regions—Mallacoota, Bendigo, Horsham and Portland—received ongoing support from RAV through structured forums on contracts, copyright, event risk management, documentation, marketing and project evaluation.

To guide the project and guarantee quality artistic outcomes, RAV artistic director Donna Jackson, supported by Rochelle Carmichael (2002 Melbourne Fringe Festival's fashion director/choreographer) were contracted to create an overarching aesthetic structure. Donna and Rochelle also provided structured workshops in each of the four regions on issues such as project planning, event staffing/management, and presentation of a quality artistic product, including choice of venue, story-boarding, scheduling, publicity, programming choreography, and so on. These formal sessions were supplemented by continuous informal support and guidance.

The Mallacoota project was led by Gizelle Regan. It brought together about 40 women from all walks of life and age groups, and encouraged skills exchange and collaboration between local emerging artists (high school and TAFE students), local professional artists and older women belonging to traditional craft guilds. A dedicated sewing circle of older women knitted Glad Wrap and cross-

Top: *Candy Queen* by Katrina Heard, columbine encrusted bodice, trimmed with candy tassels for the 'Pulse of the Wimmera' Horsham Regional Arts Association and Regional Arts Victoria Fringe Fashion Event, 19 September 2002  
Right: *Colour and Movement*, a collection of *Art-IcIes* for the Pulse of the Wimmera  
Photography: Bindi Cole



stitched sections of an overgarment with erotic images from the *Kama Sutra*. These 'delicious' overgarments, which referred to restriction, binding and the Victorian era, were peeled away during the outdoor parade to reveal more contemporary, 'decadent' undergarments.

Horsham's 'Pulse of the Wimmera' was coordinated by Christine Smith and Marion Matthews. Gorgeous sculpted outfits made from artificially-coloured and locally-grown lentils and chickpeas were stuffed into bubble wrap. These garments signified the decadence of industrial food production. Deliciousness was also celebrated with outfits like a Lipton's tea frock.

*'A total cultural success... We are fortunate to have such a wealth of talent to stage such a remarkable event in such a small remote town.'*

In Bendigo, Colleen Hurley and Bridget Robertson of arts group the Kapoozies, coordinated 80 artists, volunteer staff and stage crew for a jam-packed, pub-style night to remember at a local hotel favoured by young emerging artists and students. Vinyl costumes fashioned from bar-mats, plastics and pegs were displayed, along with intervals of trampolining, balancing and dance sequences.

At Portland, Emma Ikin coordinated the 'bizarre to the beautiful', a project which encouraged budding fashion designers to stretch their imaginations. Outfits included a hoop-skirted gown designed to fit six people at a time, bicycle dresses ready to travel, and dresses to house the wearer.

From each of these four events, 12 regional artists were invited to exhibit one of their creations at the Melbourne Fringe Fashion Event. The regional visitors had their first behind-the-scenes experience of a professional fashion parade involving media calls, dress rehearsals and the final event. Horsham designer Rosemary Kingsmill won the Metro Night's *gluttonous, gastronomic gala* category award for her *Vanilla Ice-Cream* garment, much to the delight of 93 people who had travelled to Melbourne from the four regions.

The Decadent and Delicious Fringe Fashion project had many benefits. It inspired the involvement of younger emerging artists in their communities; encouraged cross-fertilisation between emerging artists with fashion design skills and people with expertise in traditional textile crafts; refreshed some established regional arts groups with youthful energy; provided a new generation of emerging artists with the experience of working collaboratively; and developed local professional skills in art production and exhibition. It also attracted participation by community members, such as staff at a Horsham hairdressing salon who were inspired to design, make and model an entire range of outrageous headwear.

The project may have been decadent and delicious in theme but the participants were thoroughly professional. Their final evaluation noted the need for improved communication strategies between far-flung participants across the state as well as between regional and metropolitan managers. And such efforts are well worth it. As June Drake, a Mallacoota resident observed of the experience, 'A total cultural success... We are fortunate to have such a wealth of talent to stage such a remarkable event in such a small remote town'.



Funding/support: Regional Arts Victoria through the Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government initiative, VicHealth and Arts Victoria's Sharing the Festivals Program.

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# Choral Island

## Ten Days on the Island

'Choral Island' was a one-day music festival of performances by 22 choirs plus soloists. It drew 4000 people to the Port Arthur Historic Site during Tasmania's 'Ten Days on the Island' 2003 for a powerful and healing day of music.

Choral Island was initiated by Ten Days on the Island following the success of an eclectic community music event in 2001. Musical directors Mara and Llew Kiek, supported by project coordinators Peter Tanfield and Maria Lurighi, were engaged to work with what organisers estimated might be 10 community choirs. But the Kiek's two-week process of community consultation, liaison and research revealed a far bigger and more vibrant Tasmanian musical scene than expected. Twenty-two community choral groups—some 400 singers—were eager to participate in the project.

Some of the unique and unusual groups which became visible through this project included the Island Coes, an Aboriginal group performing Kentucky bluegrass in a tradition reaching back to the earliest colonial interactions between Tasmanian Aboriginals and American sealers on Flinders and Cape Barren Islands.

Though delighted at this high level of interest, it was clearly going to be a challenge to double the scale of the project. Mechanisms were devised to ensure the project met the highest professional standards. Memorandums of understanding were signed by all community choral



groups, clearly outlining their responsibilities and expectations in relation to matters including rehearsal and performance. Budgets were re-allocated, replacing beds in hotels with billeted accommodation and simplifying travel and food arrangements.

*'Port Arthur has been for me a place of ineffable sadness. All this has changed.*

*Our weekend of singing together has exorcised all the uneasy spirits. I feel sure that Port Arthur will never be the same for any of us.'*

Mara and Llew are professional musicians and singers with experience in many musical forms. They had some experience of working with large community choral groups, but nothing to rival the scale and scope of Choral Island. Travelling from NSW to Tasmania, they conducted formal coaching and workshops with each group in three development periods. They provided coaching about the anatomy and physiology of voice mechanics and the use of vocal techniques for control and effect. They delivered workshops on rehearsal and performance techniques.

Top: Company: Holy Tantra Jin-Gang-Dhyana Buddhism. Performance Title: *Dragon Dance*. 30 March 2003, Port Arthur Historic Site

Bottom: Hobart based group *Jessica*, 30 March 2003 Port Arthur Historic Site

Top Right: Company: Gait Productions. Performance Title: *Urban Safari*. 30 March 2003, Port Arthur Historic Site

Bottom Right: Massed finale front row, Tasman District School, Nubeena, singing the 'Reconciliation Song'. 30 March 2003, Port Arthur Historic Site

Photography: Michael Rayner



And, because each choir had its own repertoire, Mara and Lew also tailored specific workshops to address technical or other problems identified by individual choirs.

Organisers bussed all project participants from their communities to the outdoor venue at Port Arthur Historic Site for a full day of rehearsals in addition to the day of performance. Choral Island was then presented twice on one amazing day. Grassy spaces at the site became open air stages as did historic buildings such as the penitentiary and its cells, the chapel, ruined church, asylum and old town hall. Events occurred simultaneously during the two-hour time slots in the morning and afternoon. The performances included a Sudanese calling/response song by Ajak; the Island Coes; a Russian soloist, Zulya; the North Coast Singers performing an anti-war song and the Southern Gospel Choir.

One large central stage was constructed for the finale of each session. The finale included all the choirs and featured 'The Reconciliation Song', written and sung by 16-year-old Dewayne Smith and his friend Tom Coulson. The six-part vocal arrangement by Mara and Lew, with the help of the boys, included the Southern Gospel Choir and the massed choir (including the audience), with the chorus sung and presented in sign language by the local Peninsula school choir.

Choral Island performances left audiences and choir members glowing with pride and satisfaction. It was the



first opportunity for members of many choirs to 'hear each other'. If there's such a thing as 'a community voice' or 'a cultural voice' it was possible to hear it and see it expressed through the unity, harmony and diversity of Choral Island.

'Port Arthur has been for me a place of ineffable sadness, a place to which I would gladly not return. All this has changed. Our weekend of singing together has exorcised all the uneasy spirits. I feel sure that Port Arthur will never be the same for any of us,' said one project participant, Neil Parker.

Choral Island provided an opportunity to renew the historic sense of Tasmanian community ownership of Port Arthur Historic Site and reclaim it as a place important in the state's cultural makeup. Choral Island is the largest project produced so far by Ten Days on the Island and was arguably the largest and most extensive community cultural development project ever undertaken in Tasmania. The careful guidance of the project team ensured that this unexpectedly large community project became a festival program highlight.

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