



Presidents Report for Huon Folk Inc [Cygnet Folk Festival] at AGM 2025/26

The wonderful “Future Folk” festival of 2025 was a testament to the inimitable CFF team with Michael Russell at the helm as President of the Management Committee. I would like to begin this 2026 report by paying tribute to Michael who did a sterling job in the role throughout 2024 to deliver the 2025 festival despite some personal serious health challenges and he persevered well into 2025 again with health trials. After Michael made an undoubtedly difficult decision to step down, I was able and willing to take on the role (as you may appreciate, I had done it for a while prior to Michael so it was a little like stepping into comfortable old slippers). So here I am again reporting on the 2026 Festival “One Note for the Planet”.

It is useful when doing this report to remind myself of the published aims of the festival:

- to offer folk, ethno, world, singer-songwriter, roots and acoustic music, dance, poetry and workshops from local, national and international artists.
- to encourage interest in and awareness of folk music and associated activities to people of diverse ages and backgrounds.
- to provide support and opportunities to young musicians.
- to foster mutually beneficial relationships with the local community, businesses and associations.

It is satisfying to be able to say confidently that we are hitting the mark on all our goals.

What a feast (oh yes the pre Festival Feast event was outstanding thanks to the team led by the inimitable Sally Port and the CWA and of course the Georgian Choir from Melbourne).

But back to the feast of music and the arts that 2026 CFF, *Every Note for the Planet* brought us – we are indebted to our amazing Artistic director Erin Collins for programming such talent- from international gems such as Jen Reid(UK), Josefina Paulson and friends (Sweden), Scott Cook and Pamela Mae (US) and Grosse Isle, Old Man Luedecke and Sarah Segal-Lazar all from Canada along with a real standout act from this festival, The Pairs, to artists such as traditional Japanese artist Noriko Tadana from SA and Irish artist from Vic, Maggie Carty and festival regulars such as Gusto Gusto and Linsey Pollack, to our incredible local artists who hold their own so strongly in this amazing company – artists such as Montz Matsumoto and his Voicestrings, The Wolfe Folk and so many more. And that’s just some that I saw, there is such a depth and breadth to the talent that graces the stages in Cygnet.

We certainly had strong interest from lovers of Folk Music, new and old, this year with ticket sales the strongest we have seen in a long time. The stark reality however is that costs for all aspects of the festival are increasing at a faster rate than we are prepared to raise ticket prices– without grants we would be running at a loss. I am so thankful that Bridget Binnie our Festival Coordinator and Erin work so hard every year to seek out and make strong applications for any grants available. To this end a \$75k grant application came good in December making it possible for us to run out the festival without a loss. I should note that we have also managed over recent years with the



sound fiscal management of both grants and ticket sales – our only substantial sources of income – to rebuild a small cash reserve which was depleted completely during COVID, and we are now in a position to withstand small financial challenges if they happen.

Bridget is also our master budget manager and I know how hard she works to find the most cost effective and efficient way to balance our costs against income – she is a master of reduce, reuse, repair and recycle – and I would also like to thank our treasurer Rob Alcock for all the support he gives to Bridget in the monitoring of the budget for the Association.

Also a big shout out to Bridget for spear heading our festival sustainability campaign, which has been tracking for a few years now, to reach our goal of a waste free Festival – a trajectory which culminated with our commitment this year to be “Waste Free”. With just a few handfuls of landfill produced from a festival across 12 stages, a whole town precinct, scores of food and artisan stalls and several thousand people; our sustainable waste free goal was clearly right on target. Some departments of the local Huon Valley Council were so impressed with the way we care for the town that they have nominated us for a Tidy Towns Award! We will stay tuned on that one.

A great support on the drive for the Waste free festival front was a new Festival collaborator – Hannah Maloney – this year Hannah stepped into the very big shoes of Dr Bob Brown and took the lead in the Festival’s Sunday Morning “worship” ie - the Earth Celebration which began as an initiative of Bob Brown 10 years ago. A resounding success and a worthy successor to Bob!

Over recent years the level of engagement of our young local artists has been on the rise. We continue to be impressed with the standard of musicianship of these young people and retain our commitment to support them. This year the Dennis Dubetz Award for a young talented artist went to Ella Bridges-Thomsen, and the Festival matched this award (\$1000) with another to Nira Barber. The DD Award to an artist from afar went this year to Jen Reid from the UK. The Festival is considering, given financial viability, to continuing these Awards after the bequest from Dr Dennis Dubetz is fully expended – which will happen at the next (2027) festival.

Our relationships with the community and local sponsors continue to evolve positively. We enjoy great support from sponsors such as St James College, Hobart Brewing Co., The Huon Valley Community (Bendigo) Bank and Willie Smiths Cider as well as TPR, The Southern Swan, Cygnet Old Bank and The Lost Captain and welcome new sponsors Modern Musician, Pure Mist and Hobart Pathology. Our ongoing relationships with SETAC, the Huon Valley Council, Cygnet Primary school and our contract volunteers, SES and Sea Dragons Soccer Club are also highly valued. We are immensely grateful to the Tasmanian Government via Events Tasmania and Arts Tasmania for grants received

Festival patrons in 2025/26 were Rosemary and James Briggs and we are most grateful for their loyal patronage over several years now.



As I may have said in previous years CFF is a small festival that soars above what one might realistically expect from a low budget, volunteer dependent, small town festival. But it does so on the back of a veritable army of workers and volunteers. I have already mentioned and acknowledge with highest regard, Bridget and Erin. This year we added a new contract volunteer to our team and welcomed Arabella Watson who has had this year and will have again next year, a six month contract to be the Festival Marketing and PR coordinator. We have seen marvellous return for this investment of a marketing grant which we received, and which has and will fund these contracts with Arabella. As well as the consistent PR and social media presence, production of the newsletters and co-ordinating pop up gigs and media coverage and many other marketing forays and networking, we have thoroughly enjoyed Arabella's bubbly and infectious presence at many committee meetings and festival events. I extend to her the Committee's warmest thanks.

I have mentioned the army of volunteers and crew and as I must reinforce every year – we could not do this festival without the amazing volunteers who turn up every year – many who have come for a long time but increasingly we have new folk offering to join the ranks and this reserve of volunteers is building up; which is also in contrast to the reality faced by many charities and not for profit groups. So, hats raised, hands clapped and every adulation extended to the brilliant orange and green army.

Leading the volunteer army is the Committee which extends their volunteering to the whole year – and yes - putting on CFF is a year's work, not a few months. The Committee elected at the last AGM consisted of Michael Russell(Pres), Anne Foale(VP), Jo Matthews(Sect), Rob Alcock(Treas), Ray Mainsbridge(Pub Off), Michael Thomsen, Chris Ellis, Montz Matsumoto, Paola Tanner, Moya Ellis. As already mentioned Michael Russell stepped down in May 2025 and Anne Foale became Acting President, at this time Jo Matthews stepped up as VP and also retained the role of Secretary. In January Jo stepped down after nearly 3 years on the committee and her contributions are gratefully acknowledged here. This AGM also sees us farewelling Ray Mainsbridge who has served as a Committee member for nearly a decade being our source of legal advice and mostly holding the role of Public Officer. Ray's thoughtful, careful and considered approach, his many, many hours of background work and his willingness to get hands dirty as well as enjoy the music has been a godsend on many occasions. Thank you Ray.

Thank you to all the continuing Committee members your hard work, prudent fiscal oversight, and your infectious enthusiasm about our great festival sustains us all, and of course the Festival too.

Before concluding I would also like to mention a key member of the crew that ensures this festival comes together so seamlessly every year. That is Sue Lehtonen who has been our Performer Services Manager for 4 festivals. Sue is super-efficient, talented, genuinely caring and able to draw together multiple threads to make a performer's experience of the festival joyful and uplifting. Those who have worked closely with her have the highest praise for her competency and really appreciate how much fun she is to work alongside. Sue is ready to take a less demanding role and we will be challenged to try to find replacement; but nonetheless we are working on it! Thank you Sue.



Another thing to mention is that in 2025 we decided to tackle head on the increasingly frustrating issue of very poor mobile phone coverage in Cygnet during the Festival – not just for the sake of the Festival crew and patrons but also in respect to our local town that suffers with us the less than optimum coverage that happens during the peak festival time. A lot of work, letters, meetings, and enquiries and research led us to the decision that the only realistic option was a mobile tower - Cells on Wheels - brought into town to extend coverage. This was eventually sourced from Telstra at a cost of \$12,500. This was not a cost the festival could easily absorb so a protracted combination of seeking Tas Gov support eventually gained us \$6000 from the Premier's Discretionary fund for which we are most grateful and then we sourced the remainder from a crowd funding campaign. This is not a sustainable approach for every festival so explorations in this area will be on going.

Anne Foale
President
13.4.2026