



Festival 2005 Report

*"Variety of workshops, calibre of performers,
mix of concerts, wealth of stories & styles of
presentation, the welcome extended and all the
fun - I AM GOBSMACKED! Thanks so much."*

Megan Hicks USA

Australia's 7th National Storytelling Festival was held between September 29th and October 2nd 2005 within the City of Melville at Point Walter Recreation and Conference Centre. Bicton.

Of the 75 participants registered full-time, 28 were from overseas countries - Canada, England, Kenya, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore and the United States of America.

As well as those registered full-time, were a number of on-site volunteers - some offering specific skills in photography and street theatre; others who acted as general helpers in various areas.

In addition, each day up to forty people from around the metropolitan area registered for one or more workshops and other sessions.

According to door sales the evening concerts attracted a further 80 people.

THE OFFICIAL OPENING

The festival was officially opened with a 'Welcome to Country' by John McQuire, a local Nyungar elder.

Well-known Nyungar storyteller, Noel Nannup, left the audience spellbound by his telling of a major creation story from the Dreaming of the Wajek Nyungar people of the Melville and surrounding areas.

"It was a privilege to hear the origin stories of the Swan River area, which were unknown even to our friends who have been living in Bicton for many years now."

Nuala Hayes, Dublin.

A Gathering Concert followed in which the Wadumbah Aboriginal Dance group danced their stories to the rhythm of the kangaroo, emu and dingo.

With a change of pace an ensemble of tellers from the Western Australian Storytelling Guild presented a collection of Travellers' Tales that stretched from contemporary tales of quokkas on Rottnest Island and turtle tagging off the coast at Shark Bay to 19th century legendary figures such as Moondyne Joe and an heroic journey by the son of an early settler.

The Festival was underway.



AN OVERVIEW OF THE FESTIVAL

"Each year the scope of Australian storytelling grows. This festival was an excellent opportunity to expand professional practice & share knowledge."

Name not supplied

Over the four days of the festival the programme offered:

- nine concerts involving over 40 performers
- 35 workshops
- two Keynote Presentations
- three "Open Space" conversations
- a visual & tactile Artist-in-Residence.
- a Bush Poets' and Yarnspinnners' Breakfast

The concerts

The concerts, in addition to providing an impressive variety of oral telling styles, blended with other creative arts – visual art, music, dance, rhythm and mime – offered a powerful medium of expression - brimming with evocative stories and subversive parables that coaxed us into the complex search for meaning. Concert themes embraced stories told for the sheer joy of entertaining an audience, stories that conveyed a message, (e.g. prostate cancer), stories that provided new insight and fresh perspective on the lives of important figures in history (e.g. Elizabeth Fry), stories intended to shock listeners to action on contemporary social and/or community issues. (teen-age suicide - "Becky's Story")

The workshops

The content of workshops demonstrated basic skills in storytelling, string stories, origami, props; the use of voice, mime, movement, music and improvisation; explored deeply the healing and integrating quality of story and narrative in many contexts, - from individual biographical work - to the expansion of imagination through listening and telling traditional stories. From the feedback received, the workshops generally were highly regarded both for their content and style of presentation.

*"What a wonderful gift you have given us all!
We saw indigenous dancers "being" kangaroos,
learned how to wear a sari, learned mime and
voice production and had any one of a hundred
friendly storytellers to chat with over a meal ...
everyone was so welcoming and so ready to help
us on our learning path."*

Morna Lewis, VIC

Styles of workshops spread across a spectrum of hands-on demonstration of skills, thought-provoking discussion, seminar-style presentation. Two experimental workshops: 'Story Whispers' and 'At the Deep End' extended across the four days of the festival with a culminating presentation on the final day.

*" the festival--- it really was worthwhile! The
standard of the workshops and stories was
first class. Thankyou and your team for it all."*

Mary French, ACT

"Congratulations on the Festival organisation. It was great to have so many overseas tellers leavening our local wares. The calibre of performers in the concerts was high and diverse in style; likewise the leadership of the workshops. I was inspired in several new directions, particularly working with quasi historical stories and integrating music into storytelling." Graham Ross, SA

Keynote Presentations ...

1. Collaborating with Communities in Crises

This Keynote Presentation began with an outline of the 'Waterford Project' which grew out of a man-made disaster in a small rural community in Canada. Seven people died and almost the entire community suffered from the effects of contaminated water because regulation water checks had not been carried out. After the initial assessments and judicial enquiries were over a storyteller and a visual artist set up a healing project within that community. They provided a safe framework for survivors and community members to relate their own stories in a way that could re-unite and re-empower the community.

Following this introduction, three speakers touched on a range of communal experiences within Western Australia that carried sufficient negative impact as to deem those affected to constitute a "community in crisis". The experiences highlighted included a particular WA rural community's experience of drought; two manmade disaster scenarios (including the Tornado that ripped through Bicton in August, 2005); the current Brookdale Waste Disposal Dump saga in outer metropolitan Perth; and, the issue of domestic violence as a 'hidden' community in crisis.

Keynote Presentations (continued) ...

The challenge: How can community arts workers identify groups within their own or nearby communities to develop an appropriate project within a creative arts framework [Note: This session was followed by a workshop: Guidelines for setting up a Community Arts Project and facilitated by an experienced worker in this area.]

2. Storytelling on the Edge: The Parable of Writing

(Pamela Ateka, Kenya)

When Pamela's sister died from HIV/AIDS in 2000 Pamela committed herself to using her artistic skills to promote awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS in African Countries.

"Storytelling," she says, "is very powerful. In my African traditional Culture stories are told to educate and pass information as well as entertain."

Pamela calls her work 'edutainment'.

And 'edutained' we were, most thoroughly and delightfully, as Pamela danced and drummed her way through a most powerful, lively, provocative and entertaining presentation of "*The Parable of Writing*". Who of those present will ever forget the rule of that land: *One pen, one book?*

To many it was the highlight of the festival. It was pleasing to note that several members of local AIDS support groups were present.

“Open Space” Conversations

The “Conversations”, loosely structured around “Open Space Technology” were designed to provide the space for participants to share their own perspectives and raise issues most important to them within a general field of interest.

During the Festival three such conversations were set up, the first two being an integral part of sessions/presentations that preceded them; the third a bracket of two stand-alone sessions.

1. Conversations on Community Projects
2. Storytelling at the Edge of Propaganda
3. Concurrent Conversations:
 - Northern Suburbs Reconciliation Group – their story
 - Organizing a Festival/Event – an exchange of ideas and experiences.

Conversations on Community Projects followed on from two earlier sessions that day: a keynote presentation “Communities in Crises” and a workshop: “Guidelines for setting up a community project”.

The “Conversations” provided an opportunity in which participants could (or be encouraged) to identify/explore relevant areas in their own (or accessible) communities that might merit the setting up of a community project involving the creative arts (including storytelling)

Conversations (continued) ...

Storytelling on the Edge of Propaganda followed on from Pamela Ateka's Keynote Presentation. This session began with forming questions that spoke to this topic:

Storytelling and Propaganda: what are we learning now?

What are the limits?

Where are the ethics?

Northern Suburbs Reconciliation Group – their story

The group's representatives, Pam Yarran from Nyungar Mooro country (North of the Swan River) and Joanne Henderson, outlined their journey along paths to reconciliation and their work in identifying significant sites and as visiting speakers to schools and community groups.

A mixed audience attending this session included a number of overseas and interstate registrants. Those present expressed their amazement at the depth of the work achieved and indicated they knew of no similar work being done in their home communities.

Bush Poets' & Yarnspinners' Breakfast

Sunday morning began with the Bush Poets' & Yarnspinners' Breakfast hosted by Kel Watkins. Unlike breakfasts on other days during the festival, this event was open to the general public. Special invitations had been extended to the Bush Poets' & Yarnspinners' Association and Communicators (ITC) with whom the Guild has a long association. More than eight poets and yarnspinners provided a rich 'porridge' of entertainment.

Artist-in-Residence

A special area was set up in the gazebo where local Melville textile artist, Cynthia Breman-Rooke worked full-time on-site as the Artist-in-Residence encouraging creative artists (used to working in predominantly verbal modes of expression) to interpret festival themes in more tactile and visual ways.

This art space became an integral part of the festival. Festival participants found it a wonderful place reflect on sessions they had attended and re-interpret their experiences from workshops and conversations in fresh ways or to simply take time out from the pace of other activities.

Many created their own flags; others contributed to a group mural reflecting some of the dominant themes from the festival.

This activity culminated in the production of a large mural that was auctioned at the conclusion of the Saturday night concert.

Sacred Spaces

The Festival Finale on Sunday included 'Sacred Spaces' - a session of music, dance, meditation, story and celebration. . With the beautiful tones of the hammered dulcimer, Mary Louise Chown from Canada began the session.

There followed a Balinese Blessing Dance - made the more poignant as news of the second bombing of Bali - cast a shadow across the morning.

From the shadow emerged a story of Jonah ... a powerful story of pain, torment and laughter.

Sacred Spaces (continued) ...

And from the laughter emerged the need to celebrate ... and celebrate we did. Words from the festival were written on strips of cloth – each person present providing a word of their own.

Then from the marquee the festival horde spilled out, joined their words on cloth as they formed themselves into a circle, and danced ... and danced ... and danced.



Story Café Lunch

Final Story and handover ...

All good things must come to an end ... and so after a final gathering around the table to share meal and story, the coordinator, Mabel Kaplan told the tale of the Festival Child of faerie who having learned to laugh and play like a child of the earth, must now go back to the over-world to be renewed in spirit before returning in two years to grow more in the fun and laughter of music, dance and story.

With the festival child gone, a large wooden token ring was handed on to Annie Stewart from Victoria where, in 2007, the Festival horde will gather once more.

