



COMMUNITY SINGING EVENT

Practising What We Preach

Fay White, with the assistance of Jon Hawkes, led a session of group sound-making to demonstrate the compelling attraction of voices in concert.

Notes to accompany the session:

Believing in and exercising our own creativity

The rhetoric of community cultural development highlights and is founded on the belief - no, the fact - that ALL of us have the ability, the right, the need and the desire to exercise our innate creative capacities. It's all very well to talk this talk but, ultimately, the best, perhaps the only, way to demonstrate our commitment to this idea is to show that we do it ourselves. Unless we believe in, and exercise our own creative capacities, how can we expect anyone (senior bureaucrat or 'ordinary' person in the street) to take our rhetoric seriously?

WE CAN MAKE OUR OWN CULTURE, AND NURTURE OTHERS TO MAKE THEIRS.

Enough passive consumption – we can all become producers.

Making music together makes connections and develops relationships.

When people make music together, connections develop. These connections can transcend profound difference, illuminate unexpected unity, bring cathartic joy and extend into everyday life. We discover and develop connections through creative practises that tap our collective beings in mysterious ways beyond the scope of rational analysis (despite 400 years of 'enlightenment').

We use 'harmony' as a metaphor for the ambience of the society in which we aspire to live. This is no accident. Our bodies respond physically, sensually, emotionally to harmony – the connections between sounds moves us. Making harmony in the moment is a joyful and uplifting experience; a tangible manifestation of our dreams of oneness built on diversity.

Music is both special and ordinary.

Healthy societies and healthy people exercise all their faculties, use all their talents. Everyone has a voice, everyone has a song. Each voice is special, each song is unique. This specialness is endemic, so widespread as to be everyday, 'normal', ordinary. In our relentless pursuit of the best, we have forgotten our birthrights and denied our own abilities. Yes there are geniuses among us to be cherished and respected, but never at the expense of our own activity.

Music should be everywhere.

Imagine a society in which:

- the populace happily walk the streets singing;
- public places are regularly filled with people making spontaneous music together;
- communities and families naturally express their connectedness through a commonly held repertoire of songs that they regularly sing together;
- everyone confidently expresses themselves in song;
- public events always begin and end in group singing;
- adults and children enjoy and feel confident singing together;
- making music is universally recognised for its educational, therapeutic and connecting value;
- a song is respected as being as legitimate a way of expressing truth, hope, fear, critique, protest, love as any of the more rationally based modes;
- making music is as prevalent as listening to music;
- improvising and making new songs is an everyday activity amongst groups of ordinary people.

This is a society that would be good to live in. And it is attainable.

Making music together creates a crucible in which people can experience and productively channel the synergy that comes from collaborative effort. It provides an immediate and tangible manifestation of the power and joy of co-operation. It is the creative manifestation of community. It transforms the metaphor of harmony into a real life experience. It is always a creative act, in the moment, a practice of the 'everyday arts' as an integral part of ordinary people's daily lives.

Fay White's way of leading people into singing together is an object lesson in transforming reluctance into action, nervousness

into confidence, fear into energy, individualisation into collective expression.
It may be that singing together is the most effective first step in developing community.

Fay White and Jon Hawkes are both active in Community Music Victoria, which has been co-ordinating a three year program of community singing throughout Victoria. Funded by VicHealth, the program has helped in the establishment and development of over sixty community-based independent and ongoing singing groups throughout rural and regional Victoria.

Fay White is a singer and facilitator who identifies with the words of poet Adrienne Rich in trying to be 'part of an underground stream . . . of voices that resist the voices that tell us we are nothing'. Fay knows that music, especially song, can make connections, inspire, encourage, build community and play a role in social change. Her sessions and workshops do this. Fay has pioneered 'Vocal Nosh' - a re-vitalised form of community singing that is taking root across Victoria. She's led specifically geared singing sessions for community groups, women's groups, teachers, arts workers, health workers, chaplains and students and has facilitated exploration of environment, arts, spirituality, wisdom and justice themes at conferences and gatherings all over Australia. She is currently working through Community Music Victoria to encourage, train and resource singing leaders across the state.