

Wellington Folk Centre Inc (Acoustic Routes) Annual Report for the Folk-Year September 2008-August 2009

A Recap of the Year

In my first ever President's Annual Report I am pleased to say that this has been a surprisingly strong year for the club. Continuing the trend from last year, membership is up again, and attendances at events have been very consistent –despite an absolutely amazing proliferation of alternative venues offering jam sessions, opportunities to perform and to be entertained in bars, cafes and a range of other fab venues, we have held more than steady. The Sunday singarounds remain popular with some of our members, and the monthly concerts and the more recent open mics are usually well attended. Of less certainty have been the Friday club nights in recent months. Our fifth Sunday Blackboard concerts have again delivered some great evenings, but some of the “special concerts” had weaker turnouts than anticipated. This may have been more a function of timing than anything else-they were rather bunched up! So it will be interesting to gather views on these and other issues through the questionnaire, and plan the coming year with some due care.

Financially we have broken even, which is good news as we have been quite concerned at how difficult it is to cover running costs under the current format and little lee-way. There is also very little buffer to allow any exploration of new directions or to purchase bits and pieces that we inevitably need. We decided however that rather than upping membership fees, we would really explore other options for improving the situation. The incoming committee will be reviewing fundraising possibilities and the way in which we pay artists and structure door charges. Music is what drives us-we need to balance the books and find effective ways to afford what we want to do, not just get money for its own sake.

The Committee had a tough but productive year. Some of the jobs people have taken on have been particularly tough and time consuming because of the learning curve but we have bowled on through without too much love lost! As reported in the August Balladeer, the Committee held a Goal setting session across 2 days with an external facilitator and after a very intense time, and greatly assisted by our facilitator, we have generated a draft Music Plan for the coming 12 months; a draft Strategy to 2012 and a draft budget to address goals within the strategy. A questionnaire was also circulated to members for feedback. Results are starting to trickle in, which is really great.

The incoming Committee will be tasked with ratifying and implementing these new directives, ensuring of course that they take heed of the work carried out by a small group in 2007-08 (Murray, Gerard and Dale Lacey) and of the feedback we get through the questionnaire.

Acoustic Routes has also applied for a WCC Grant to explore options for continuation/development of the Balladeer. Effort has been put into trying to keep the website more current, and we have increased our advertising profile through other event websites. We have made small but significant changes to the layout at Toi Poneke, and thanks to generous donation from John Sutherland and Acoustic Mayfair, have acquired a stage to showcase our backdrop (designed by Liz Merton) and banner (designed by Col Wright). We have tried to open up floorspots before concerts and latterly this has worked well.

Participatory events, as always, have proved popular and we have seen a number of new (and young) performers join the club's activities this year.

Some of the feedback that we have received tells us that while most people think that Toi Poneke is a rather uncool venue (no frills shall we say), it DOES offer one of the few venues around town with good natural acoustics and a listening audience. The club has also received some praise for addressing the needs of participation through an increasing choice of singaround, floorspots, blackboard and open mic formats. There has been transient interest from younger age groups, but the good thing is that young people are out there 'doing it' so we needn't be afraid that acoustic music is in its death throes any longer! I think that the interchange across age groups as we all rediscover each other is going to be an exciting thing that will unfold over the next few years.

A couple of things are still missing for me though, and that 1) is the opportunity to sing along (as opposed to sing around. ie singing together, rather than taking it in turns. So, I will be investigating the appetite for sing-along sessions where a book of say 100 fav songs is provided, with chords, and the only taking turns aspect of it would be you get a chance to choose the song! But everyone joins in and plays. Its a great way of learning new songs...they aren't often sung well in this way, but its a good way of finding out about songs that you might like to take away and develop yourself and it can be fun too. 2) The other gap I see is how to attract some of the more talented musicians to attend our club more often. Its not that we don't hear some fabulous stuff...but relatively few come along on a regular basis to join in with us...maybe I am dreaming..they are probably all off playing at gigs, but maybe we are too dull or....??? its worth pondering on. Maybe we need to proactively need to invite them to help lead us in some of our more clubby events. Anyway...there is plenty to think about.

Club concerts and events 2008-09

A summary of the year's club concerts is below:

<i>Month</i>	<i>Main Club Concert</i>	<i>Other significant Events</i>
September	Carol Bean; Whisky and Rye	
October	None	Wellington Folk Festival
November	Alistair Hulett, Dave Rovicks	
December	None	Christmas party
January	None	Summer break
February	Pat Higgins/Mary Hubble	
March	Laura Collins	Fagans concert Introduction of open mic nights on 3 rd sundays
April	Mike Harding	FAERD concert
May	Club Showcase x 2	
June	Richard Gilewitz	Goal Setting
July	Helen Dorothy	Museum of City and Sea
August	Blind date concert	Riverslea, Museum of City and Sea

Also, 10 singarounds, 10 Friday night sessions, 4 jam sessions, 5 open mics, 4 blackboards, 3 special concerts, and a weekend retreat at Riverslea. That is A LOT! The Committee really are a committed lot!

Club Member Activities

Although not Acoustic Routes club activities as such, many of our members are heavily involved in organising other significant acoustic music events or other folk clubs that 'up the profile' of folk music in the region, and improve the excitement about the whole folk scene, which in turn feeds back positively to the club. These are positive things and I am amazed at how we all find the time!

Examples include: Laftah Festival, Mojo Acoustic, Welsh dragon, Museum of City and Sea, the Wellington Folk Festival, Strathean, Waiohonga, House Concerts, Mayfair Acoustic, Pukerua Bay Folk Club, Bluegrass Soc., Lembas, CD/DVD launch events. I am sure there are more

Thanks

There are a number of other people and organisations who have provided help and direct assistance to the club, including:

the Wellington Museums Trust who have who have continued to involve us (and our performing members) in their public programme of events, John Burnell (our website Manager), Kay and Tony Larsen of Datastream Instant Printing (who print the Balladeer and other material for us at mates rates), Sue Ikin (who organises stuffing envelopes and posting the Balladeer), Janette Munneke (who continued to support us with Balladeer content, editing and formatting), Ruth Birnie (for advice and proof reading of the Balladeer), Murray Kilpatrick (for running jam sessions through the first half of the year), Karen Clarke (who facilitated our goal setting meetings), Julie Kilpatrick and Diana Bastion for assisting with grant applications; Ruth and Gerard for running most of the Singarounds, and last but not least, the Wellington City Council who have responded to several of our complaints about a range of issues at Toi Poneke.

Acoustic Cyber-Routes

John Burnell has again agreed to continue maintaining the web site. This year we have changed the appearance of the web site further and made an effort to keep it up to date. This resource is under-utilised though at this point. Dale Lacey has assisted in reviewing our web site structure and content and we hope to progress this further in the near future.

A BIG hand for the Committee

This year the bouquets go to: Nik Curry for taking on the Balladeer, grant applications and the whole club commitment thing with such gusto (as well as driving in from the Kapiti coast almost every month); to Col Wright for taking on the City Council and re-jigging the room layout and being there unfailingly; to Peter Denee for his persistence and drive as treasurer and to get us to do the goal setting-brilliant! to Derek Burfield also for just being there for almost every event, to Gerard Hudson who must have found it immensely frustrating trying to guide a bunch of newbies into Committeedom, to Anne McGregor as

Secretary while juggling a new job and to Marion Pawson who wrestled with the computer world to try and improve our advertising.

Derek, Marion and Gerard are standing down from the Committee. Gerard is due a break having been with us for quite a few years, and Derek and Marion have other commitments that need more of their attention. Nik is wavering and Annie may be as well...we shall see at the AGM. But there are murmurings of possible replacements among the corn!

In Conclusion

I actually didn't think I was going to make it through this year. Stage of life combined with taking on something like this was a recipe to stress the calmest person, and I am not a calm person! But, I don't give up easily, and after a learning curve that was steeper than Everest, I now feel very positive about what the current committee have achieved, and the club's future directions. I have also come to appreciate what previous committees had to get to grips with and understand why things did or didn't happen. Nothing happens out of context, and the only reason that we have been able to make some changes is that people were ready for it. So thanks to all our members for continuing to support Acoustic Routes – and to the many of you who have personally thanked me or expressed appreciation and confidence in my and the Committee's efforts this year. I am thrilled with the questionnaire response, and am looking forward to developing the Music Sched and all the other things we have ahead of us

So.. 'If music be the food of love Play On!!!'
Here's to next year for Acoustic Routes.

Mary Livingston
President 2008-09