

MUSIC: PLAY FOR LIFE

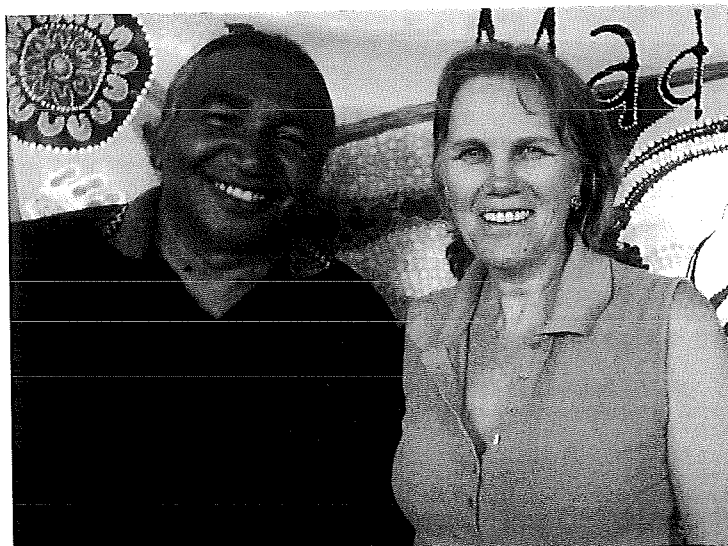
Australia's Community Music Leaders



Karen Roben (with guitar), and the Wild Choir

In late February, six everyday Australians were awarded Music in Communities Awards for their work in leading some of the nation's outstanding community music programs. Offering a total prize pool of \$20,000, the most recent awards focused on inspirational leadership. One of the national judges, Dr Brydie-Leigh Bartleet (Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University) reflects on what the awards revealed this year.

Ask any community musician what makes community music so vibrant, and more often than not they will say "inspiring leadership!" That's what we found in a recent nation-wide survey of 200 community musicians for the *Sound Links* study: 65% of people rated "inspiring leadership" the most important success factor in any community music activity. It's no surprise then that this year's Music



Jo Randall with George Walley



Mike Hyder

in Communities Awards theme "inspiring leadership" attracted such attention. With over 100 nominations from across the country, this year's awards certainly shone the spotlight on the achievements of so many passionate and committed community music leaders. I had the pleasure of serving on the judging panel again this year, alongside Tina Broad (Music: Play for Life), Vivienne Winther (Music For Everyone) and Michael Sollis (Australian Youth Music Council). Judging these awards is never an easy task. Each finalist has their own merits and as a judging panel we were keen to recognise and celebrate each of their achievements. We deliberated long and hard about every application, but in the end we had to narrow the 19 finalists down to six winners.

We were particularly impressed with each finalist's leadership capabilities, musical expertise, pedagogical skills, and advocacy abilities. Reading through all the nominations, it became clear that these leaders are also highly creative people who have the ability to find a multitude of different ways to engage the broader community in music. In other words, they are deeply committed to the concept of social inclusion. This was certainly seen in the work of winner Karen Roben, from Albury Wodonga, VIC, who received the *Singing for Social Inclusion*

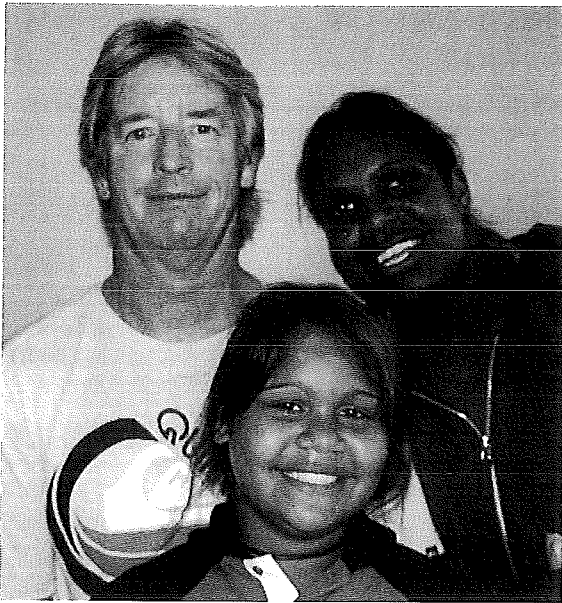
Award. In 2006, Karen founded The Wild Choir catering for people with a range of musical abilities and intellectual, physical and psychological difficulties. She later incorporated the group as MusicAbility Inc. and paved the way for strong growth via government cultural funds, small arts grants and philanthropic funding. Gifted with management as well as musical skills, Karen was able to start something and keep it growing, bringing together the broadest range of people and helping each person to find their voice through music.

We were also struck by the way these leaders have a deep understanding of how music can connect people to their cultural identity and broader community and as a result improve self-esteem. This was evident in the work of winner Peter Lowson, from Alice Springs, NT, who was recognised with the *Mentoring Indigenous Youth Award*. In 2004, Peter started Drum Atweme, a percussion program to help young indigenous town camp children overcome social isolation and low self-esteem. His strong mentoring and peer leadership has had the added benefit of improving their outcomes at school and resulted in 13 of the children attending boarding schools interstate in the hope they will return to the Alice Springs community as leaders of the future. As judges we felt Peter's work provided a

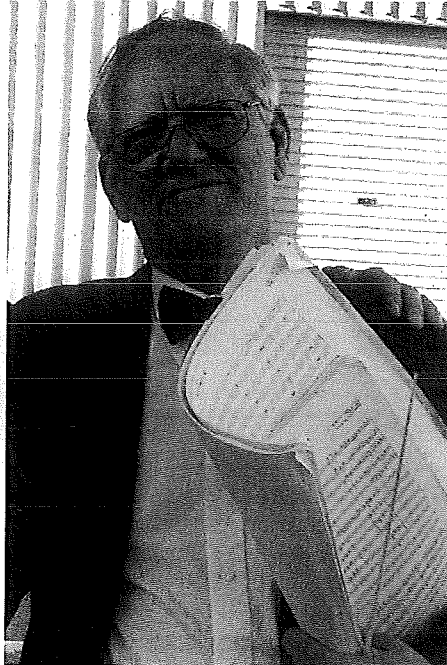
brilliant example of how achievements in music can lead to broader improvements in school performance and other life skills. By giving at-risk youth access to quality musical resources and committed mentoring, we were impressed with the way in which Peter empowers them to break down social barriers and reach new heights.

Inspiring community music leaders also have the knack of encouraging others to have a go. They are highly efficient communicators and listeners, with the ability to make everyone feel important. Take for example winner Ray Gage, from Gungalda, QLD who was rewarded with the *Local Hero Award* for his work developing the Gungalda Hotel Music Club. This Club operates on three simple principles: anyone can get up and have a go; people learn from each other; and performance needs a live audience. Ray encourages and fosters local talent in a "safe place" where beginners and amateur musicians can receive support and advice from professional musicians who drop by the club for a jam. Ray has provided a musical and social lifeline to his community with so few resources except his big heart and can-do attitude.

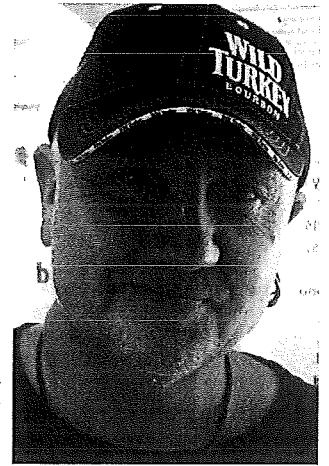
Looking at the qualities of each of the finalists, another thing stands out: they lead by example. Mike Hyder, from Albany, WA was awarded for his *Passion*



Peter Lowson



Bob Favell



Ray Gage

for *Playing*. An agricultural scientist by day, Mike spends most of his other hours indulging in his true passion: playing and teaching the violin. Shortly after arriving in Albany, Mike assembled the Albany String Quartet, started a folk/Celtic *Just Fiddling* group for all ages and abilities and was involved in Albany Fine Music Society, attracting national and international musicians and ensembles to the region. We were impressed with the way Mike creates opportunities for players of all levels to mix with renowned Australian and international musicians – this is most impressive in such an isolated regional area – and he creatively draws on chamber music, folk, Celtic and anything else he can think of to keep his players interested and engaged.

Inspiring community music leaders are also deeply attuned to the unique needs and concerns of people in their local area and have a vision for how they want music to assist their communities to grow, heal and connect with one another. This was clearly shown through the work of winner Jo Randell, from Forrestfield, WA, who was given the *Reconciliation Award*. Jo's initial 13 week project, *Madjitil Moorna, Singers of Aboriginal Songs*, has gone from strength to strength over the past

five years. Led by award-winning Noongar musicians, George Walley and Della Rae Morrison, her choir of Indigenous and non-Indigenous singers comes together in mutual respect to help maintain one of the world's oldest living cultures. Jo identified a need, developed the concept and then was sensitive enough to stand back and let Indigenous leaders take the helm. We were inspired by Jo's commitment not only to preserving culture and traditions, but also reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through song.

Community music leaders also tend to be incredibly well connected to a network of other teachers, musicians, council workers, and so on, and are skilled advocates. Many also see the benefits of connecting community music activities with school music activities. Take, for example, winner Bob Favell from Cairns, QLD, who was recognised with the *Service beyond the School Gate Award*. Over 35 years, Bob has created a high-impact music program involving primary and secondary students and top quality community orchestras and brass ensembles, including the North Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra which was born out of Bob's desire to provide a forum where outstanding students could further advance their playing by performing

for their own community. As a judging panel we were most impressed with the way Bob has tirelessly served both his school and community above and beyond the call of duty, and significantly enriched this North Queensland city for more than 35 years. There is much to be said for this kind of longevity and the benefits it can bring a community.

Our congratulations go out to all the finalists and winners of the 2010 Music in Communities Awards. We hope that this recognition will not only serve to inspire you in your future community music endeavours, but also motivate others around the country to follow your lead.

The Awards are an initiative of Music: Play for Life, the Council's grassroots music advocacy program.

To find out more about the Music in Communities Awards, go to: www.musicincommunities.org.au

To read more about the study, *Sound Links: Community Music in Australia* go to: www.griffith.edu.au/music/queensland-conservatorium-research-centre/resources/sound-links-final-report

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