

2023 President's Report

Milestones, Memories and Meaning

Without a doubt, the key focus of 2023 was Burnie Arts Council's 75th Birthday Celebrations.

In BAC's broader remit of advocacy and community connection, however there were other activities and events of importance.

Change is afoot in Burnie!

Feb ... Stall at Burnie Community House's Family Fun day. We had a simple, inexpensive set-up which generated a lot of interest and engagement. Paper planes and (thank you PULP and your remaining one-tonne reel of paper) large white sheets laid out on an elevated platform for some whole-of-body drawing with thick markers. It was inclusive and developed its own momentum as participants free-wheeled and innovated with the materials at hand. Just goes to show that great times can be had with the most basic of equipment.

2023 AGM – Noted of because of the presence of numerous members of Burnie's allied arts/cultural organisations. This echoed the framework of BAC at various times in its history – where it was actually made up wholly of representatives from other groups, with BAC serving as an umbrella body.

March... Performance time. A couple to note. DoMaur Production's of *RENT* – the first time they had performed a musical in the BAFC theatre. WOW! It was a knock-your-socks off ensemble performance which showcased (if anyone doubted it) the depth of talent on the coast and Burnie's long-held strength in the area of musical performance. *Chicago*, presented by the Burnie Musical Society in October, was equally as impressive. (Apologies for the chronological glitch, it got too busy later in the year to mention all the productions in order).

... *I'm With Her*. Featuring a cast of local women, our wonderful Lynne Price among them. What can I say? This sharply written play pulled no punches, saw a few of our erstwhile civic leaders dropping 'f' bombs, and, as the performance progressed, perhaps had the males in the room quietly taking up less space. These true stories stung, but oh how this novice cast carried them with power and grace. If the purpose of great art is to make you question, this play dished it out in spades. There was an added layer of meaning – we knew these people on stage. They weren't telling their own stories, but there was a tapping of universal themes, and the camaraderie among them was evident.

April... Stage One of the refurbishment of the BAFC commenced (southern end). This has been a long time coming, well-overdue, with a bit of a bumpy short-term lead-in (see President's Reports from 2021 and 2022)

Consultation...

The citizens of Burnie were asked to provide input about many things this year. BAC provided input and encouraged others to do so.

Burnie City Council's Strategic Plan. Two rounds of consultation. Firstly general – 'what's important to you?' and secondly 'This is our draft; did we get it right?' For the former, BAC submitted a 2, 200w document. Eyebrows were raised when – despite input from us and other arts-focussed individuals and groups, despite being 'The City of Makers,' arts and culture were not mentioned in the latter. In no uncertain terms did we tell council 'You have got this bit wrong,' and encouraged others to provide that feedback also.

[The word] *'Artistic' does, but this is an adjective. Almost anything can be artistic. Arts, culture and creativity have weight and meaning in their own right and require greater prominence than the draft plan provides.* (quote from second submission). Disappointingly, we don't actually believe this has been corrected in the final draft. It is actually challenging to locate the 'final' version on the council's website to check.

City Centre Urban Plan – Throughout May there were three public 'pop-up' sessions seeking public feedback on the revitalisation of our city centre (tagline – Burnie Beats). The revamp of the cultural precinct is a critical part of this. GHD are the consultants who are managing this project, along with the **Burnie Gateway** project, funded by a 1.25-million-dollar grant from the State government. This involves a significant public artwork or artworks for the 'entrance' to the CBD. Selection for the gateway project involved shortlisting applicants (three were chosen); they then had public consultation sessions in the CBD; they then presented their re-developed ideas to council and the CBD reference group (based on the public feedback – one group withdrew), and the two final designs were then presented to the public. An online survey / poll ultimately decided the 'Welcome Gesture' by Geoff Farquhar-Still and David Hamilton. Public Art is always controversial, this decision is no exception, and at the time of writing I believe some aspects of the design may be up for review at the Council Meeting in the coming days. *

Cultural Precinct – Brand development of the Cultural Precinct. In September the community were asked to provide feedback about what is meaningful about our beloved Civic Centre/ BAFC, (or whatever the next name for our home of the arts might be) via the 'Chip-In' campaign. Sometime soon we will be presented with 'Brand Identity Concepts.'

After all of this, an occasional glance at BCC's Facebook stream shows a high level of discontent regarding certain initiatives and perceived lack of consultation. Whilst – true to mission - BAC have taken all opportunities provided for feedback, we note a general level of consultation fatigue, cynicism, and pockets of dissatisfaction about BCC's approach to consultation. This is now being reviewed by council via (ahem) a feedback survey.

Burnie Print Prize

How wonderful was it to experience an exhibition opening at the BRAG just like days of old. The place was abuzz with new and old faces, many visiting artists, amazing display of works, canapes galore and the bubbles flowing freely. Remember it well, friends, it was the last in this 40+ year version of the gallery. A fitting occasion, and we look forward to the revamp.

Artlands

Your's truly was one of 80 regional artists/ and arts workers who were selected (on application), to attend the Regional Arts Australia Conference in Canberra in September. Under a very different model to the usual Artlands, the quid-quo-pro of having an all-expenses covered trip to the national capital (the venue was the big room at the NGV, nonetheless, and included an afterhours tour of the site with curators) was that we had to work. The idea was to develop strategy and policy for regional arts for the next ten years. No pressure!!

Let's say *start* to develop strategy and policy for regional arts for the next ten years.

We were with our peers. The selection process had worked. These were highly experienced individuals with sharp insights about how we can do things better: Amplify the value of our activities

for our rapidly changing communities; lighten the load for the ageing stalwarts; keep our young people engaged – maybe even to the degree that they will stay in their regional areas. Figure out a better model than the competitive grant system which sees us competing with each other, hours of wasted work, and the inherent insecurity and stress of projects green or red-lighted on the turn of a funding decision. This is the world we exist in. I think everyone in that room had experienced or were on the brink of burnout. No other sector would stand for it.

Something happened. On the final day we delivered a series of presentations to a group of Canberran bigwigs representing leading arts/culture/regional development bodies. They heard. They couldn't not. What was communicated, borne from three days having the freedom to think and share sans any battle to prove our value or worth, tipped the assembled participants into a place of raw honesty and clarity. Thanks RAA. It was a transformational experience.

Take-Off!

This was a long time coming, with a journey much like a not-quite-right paper plane - up, down, backwards, with a surprise lift at the end! Sponsored by the Bank of Us's Bank of Useful ideas initiative, *Take-Off!* was originally due to take place in 2020. Covid saw it mothballed and at risk of not being revived at all until last year. Lyndal and Pam worked primarily in conjunction with Belinda from the Children's university to devise a program of events which included after school workshops, a free screening of the Australian *Paper Planes* film at Metro Cinemas, and a trip to the Wynyard Aero Club. This was the most amazing experience. After the requisite fly-off, Q and A's with real pilots, tours of the site, hangers and planes, those in attendance (after various waivers were signed) were invited for an actual flight! It was memory making at its best. Head to the gallery at the BAC website for very clear examples of what is known as the 'flying smile.' Thanks to Belinda from CU, Daniel Edwards from Montello Primary School for the STEM component, Chloe Townsend for tutoring the creative component of the workshops, Metro Cinema, Councillor Chris Lynch for officiating the final fly-off and the generous and stellar crew from the Wynyard Aero Club.

We Turned 75!

And what a weekend was had! With thanks to a grant from the Burnie City Council, plans commenced early in 2023 for a series of events to mark this milestone. Thoughts about an alumni project commenced at last year's AGM. At that stage we had a list of names – maybe 30. The ideas evolved. What transpired became so substantive, in fact, that two projects have spilled into this year.

The weekend kicked off with a concert by the Dream Burnie Municipal Band at Hellyer College (Burnie alumni Van Walker, Will Hindmarsh and Zane Lindt), with an hilarious opening set by Josh Earl. Thanks to Hellyer College for contributing to this event. We also received an additional Regional Arts Fund Grant to support this lunchtime concert and the rooftop concert which took place the next day.

It was a typical blustery October morning, threatening showers. The rooftop gig (also the Dream Burnie Municipal Band) moved to the mid-level of the carpark and – much to the surprise of Burnie's Saturday morning shoppers, blasted them with a full-on rock and roll concert. Songs referenced Fortuna Garden restaurant and Banjo's sausage rolls. It's clear that – however accomplished you become in the big city – there are some things from your hometown that stay with you forever.

By 5pm the festivities kicked off downstairs in the gallery, with our conventional 75th birthday ceremonies. Mayor Brumby praised the value of groups such as BAC, Lynne Price provided a potted history of our 75 years, and patron Alex McKenzie received the biggest response with a brutal, but balanced perspective on recent events in Burnie's cultural landscape. A highlight was a surprise visit from notable alumni Zima Anderson who spoke eloquently about the nurturing environment provided by the Burnie community – the foundation of her success today.

We also presented a plaque to the Hiscutt family acknowledging the incredible legacy of Hugh and Joan. Hugh Hiscutt died in March, 2023. We thank his family, especially Bernadette, for her assistance with archival documentation about Hugh's life.

Justin Heazlewood's book: after a quick chat and an idea seeded at 2023's AGM, Justin embarked on writing a book about a select number of Burnie's arts alumni. Initially due to be released for the 75th celebrations, during the writing the project has revealed its unique potential to tell not only individual stories, but also provide a deeper analysis about life as an artist and the quirks of this town we call home. Watch this space for a release date and related events.

Huge thanks also to Justin for wrangling the Dream Burnie Municipal Band and curating the concert.

Wall of Fame – We knew there was short list destined for Justin's book. What about the long list ... screamed (BAC Treasurer) Heather and I?? Heather (in a way that only Heather can) sprang into action, and over the course of 3 – 4 weeks created 145 commemorative tiles celebrating Burnie's amazing creative community. This was a herculean feat, especially given that the first step (procuring the information and photos from the participants) had not even started. This Wall of Fame was on display at the pre-show soiree, then managed a quick transfer to upstairs for perusal after the concert. Due to public demand, it stayed up and was well visited for a week after the concert.

The concert!

Josh Earl had us in stitches from the start and kept up a lively pace with MC duties throughout the night. Wendy Moles and Nick Hart kicked off the night, followed by a recording by the City of Burnie Brass Band, our Dream Burnie boys again, a clip by Justin Heazlewood and a set by none other than David Turner which included a congratulatory message by the legendary Peter Combe.

Our two babies are all grown up

Both incubated by BAC, **Paper on Skin** and **Stringalong** continue to go from strength to strength. Highlights of the year for Stringalong included playing with the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra in Latrobe in September. They also entertained us during our pre-show soiree at the concert. In December Paper on Skin signed a partnership agreement with Devonport City Council providing security and stability for the 2024 and 2026 iterations of the events.

Changing of the Guard

Both Pam Thorne (Secretary) and Lynne Price (past President and Vice President) will be stepping down from Executive roles this year. We thank them for their tireless years of service. Their contribution cannot be quantified. We are grateful, however, that they will continue to remain as members. Should they leave entirely the shock may be too much to bear....

Thankyou everyone who contributed to such a meaningful year of milestones and memories.

Lyndal Thorne 25th Feb 2024.

[*see Feb 2024 Burnie City Council minutes for the outcome of the *Welcome Gesture* decision]