

# **Celebrations for Development and Change**

## a forum series

### **When:**

**Forum One** was held online during November 2001 visit

<http://www.ala.asn.au/interests/phorum/index.html/forumid=88707>

**Forum Two:** Friday March 22 2002, 9am to 5pm

**Forum Three** will be a stream within the international conference 'Education & Social Action', Centre for Popular Education, UTS, 11th to 13th Dec, 2002

Other forum opportunities will be developed in partnership with the Australian Centre for Event Management, UTS.

### **Who are the forums for?**

People involved in facilitating celebrations within community, government, non-government and business settings. Forum presenters and participants are drawn from a wide range of fields including cultural development, event management, education, organisational change management, the arts, regional development, capacity building, health promotion, celebrants, community work and social action.

### **What is the scope of the forums?**

Key themes include the people involved in celebrations practices (ie those who create them and those who are engaged by them), where celebrations occur, and the processes of celebration practice. The purposes and outcomes of celebrations are also of particular interest. For example, what difference can celebrations make to people's lives, and how can they contribute to building and strengthening communities.

The aim of the forums is not to theorise in an abstract way about different strategies to facilitate celebrations, but to use case studies to create the contexts from which celebration practices are analysed. Subsequently, the research needs within this area will be mapped.

The forums also provide an opportunity for various groups of people engaged in celebration practices to network. For example, event managers who use community festivals to foster tourism, health promotion practitioners interested in fostering the health of individuals and communities, change managers who want to create and reinforce corporate cultures.

### **Expression of Interest**

Expressions of interest to present or facilitate sessions at future forums are welcome. For further details or to talk about ideas, please contact Julieanne Hilbers on 0408 060266 or [jhilbers@uts.edu.au](mailto:jhilbers@uts.edu.au)

### **Forum proceedings and papers**

The possibility of commissioning papers that arise from the forum series is being explored. Hence, forum discussions may be taped and used in a possible publication.

# Program - Friday March 22, 2002

8.30am – 9.00am

**Tea, coffee and registration**

9.00am – 9.05am

**Welcome**

**Rick Flowers**, Director, Centre for Popular Education, UTS

9.05am - 9.35am

**Why Celebrate?**

**Annette Maie (Rups-Eyland)**, Phd Performance Rituals

30 minute facilitated exchange between participants

9.35am - 10.35am

**Achievements and Challenges: Show & Tell**

**Celebrations of Emotion**

**David Wright**, Department of Social Ecology, UWS

15 minute presentation

**Celebration of a Water Supply**

**Annie Bolitho**, Mermaid and Flow Engineer

30 minute presentation

**Cultural Development: Celebrating Culture through the Arts**

**Juan Perez**, Cultural Development Officer, Campbelltown City Council

15 minute presentation

10.35am - 11.00am

**Networking**

**Julianne Hilbers**, Centre for Popular Education and

**Philbert Rochecouste**, Dolphiniumm

25 minute facilitated exchange and mapping exercise

11.00am to 11.30am

**Break**

11.30am - 12.30am

**Panel Discussion:**

What are the defining features of 'effective' celebration practice?

How can we build support for celebration practice?

Chair: **Johnny Allen**, Centre for Event Management, UTS

Discussion starter: **Rick Flowers**, Centre for Popular Education, UTS

Panel Members

**Victoria Keighery**, Regional Arts NSW

**Michelle Hall – O'Connor**, NSW Local Government & Shires Association

**Scott Ohara**, Community Cultural Development NSW

**Rob Harris**, Centre for Event Management, UTS

Open discussion and comments invited

12.30pm - 1.30pm

**Lunch**

1.30pm - 2.30pm

**Case Study: Celebrating Community Work**

**Susan Ambler**

**Debbie Horsfall**

**Judy Pinn**

**Lesley Sammon**

**Lizzie Vesely**

**Mary Waterford**

Critical analysis of a case study: Why celebrations were used; What impact it had;  
How barriers were addressed. Questions invited.

2.30pm to 3.00pm

**Celebrating with music and movement**

**Suzanne Mitten-Lewis**, Creative Dance

Participatory dance celebrating World Water Day

3.00pm – 3.10pm

**Break**

3.10pm – 4.00pm

**Information Exchange**

**Tricia Cooney**, Circus Solaris

Community Street Festivals: Lessons from Europe

**Paul Brown**, School of Science and Technology, UNSW

Adelaide Festival: Maralinga Project

‘Converge’

Open invitation to participants

4.00pm – 4.50pm

**Seasonal Celebrations: Autumn Equinox**

**Glenys Livingstone**, Phd Seasonal Celebrations

Participants will be invited to participate in a seasonal celebration

4.50pm – 5.00pm

The next adventure....

**Julianne Hilbers**, Centre for Popular Education

# Forum Session Summaries

9.00am – 9.05am

Welcome

**Rick Flowers**, Director, Centre for Popular Education, UTS

9.05am - 9.35am

**Why Celebrate?**

**Annette Maie (Rups-Eyland)**, Phd Performance Rituals

9.35am - 10.35am

**Achievements and Challenges: Show & Tell**

**Celebrations of Emotion**

David Wright, Department of Social Ecology, UWS

The model I teach through is essentially a celebratory one. It involves emotional as well as intellectual communication, it values communality, hence the sharing of experience. It values the difficult to communicate. It values the bodies and the intelligence and recognises that bodies function differently to minds in any social setting. It does not require explanation, though it is available for analysis. It works with and to some degree relies upon engagement and fulfilment: an uplifting feeling is a part of the accomplishment. It is integral to the experience of learning that I am pursuing through these classes.

And yet this is not the theme of my presentation at this forum. My presentation is an attempt to evoke a distillation of the celebratory process... to play with metaphors further, it is an alchemical pursuit of celebration. An attempt to understand how base metals can be turned into gold. In that sense, like any story of transformation, it is a personal story as well as a discussion of a research process.

For some time I've been interested in how men understand and conceptualise their own emotional experience. This arises from a powerful experience of loss, in my own life. My own experience, a story in itself, caused me to seek out other men and their experiences. I wanted to understand how they 'felt'. I didn't want to know their advice or their story or their explanation or their expertise I wanted to hear from them 'what it felt like', with the emphasis on the word 'like'. I wanted to know this partly because I was having trouble with my own feelings: they shifted constantly and placed remarkable demands upon me. But more than that, they re-introduced me to my emotionality. I was both surprised and excited to realise just how much I felt, how deeply I experienced this loss, how powerfully moved I could be. It seemed as if was this process of loss and grief re-connected me to my emotional being. I wanted to hear from other men how they experienced and communicated their emotionality. Hence the interest in what it 'felt like'. Aware of the difficulties in portraying feeling it seemed that metaphor was the most appropriate means of gathering feelings. "It felt like..." "It was like I was..." Far better this than a clinical analysis of what happened when.

The result of this research – I spoke to about 13 men over a three month period for between one and two hours, usually in public places, in coffee shops and once in a bar, three times in a private home – was a mixture of story, analysis and metaphor. Usually more story and metaphor than analysis, and even then the analysis was reflective, uncertain and vulnerable, more than it was clinical, critical or grounded.

These conversations were also celebratory. In a sense the celebration was a concentrated affair... it was celebration reduced to its principal components... celebration on a small scale that serves, in effect as a primer for appreciating some of the essential elements of celebration on a larger scale.

- It operated within specific boundaries, within a liminal space
- This space called up openness, accessibility even vulnerability
- The experience within the space was phenomenologically 'new'
- It marked a time as somehow 'special', concentrated and 'meaningful'
- In many respects it was 'uplifting' and 'transforming'
- It aligned individual subjectivities and created shared understanding
- While an artfully constructed experience, it arrived at a time of evident conclusion

### **Celebration of a Water Supply**

Annie Bolitho, Mermaid and Flow Engineer

Water, a basic ingredient of life, is brought to to the tap by a complex technological process. In my doctoral study, new dimensions in Water Conversation, one of my assumptions was that a public water supply is worth celebrating.

The project took place with the support of Rous Water, the Northern Rivers bulk water supplier. It involved writing and story telling, in the context of adult community education (ACE) and the Rous workforce, and for lay participants, exposure to the Nightcap Water Treatment Works. The final event was a 'One-off splash of Water Celebration!', held at Rous Water's Lismore office block.

Gaston Bachelard suggests that the axes of poetry and science 'are opposed from the start', and that the best one can hope for in terms of mediating them, is 'to unite them as two well-chosen contraries.' In light of this, what might a celebration including water specialists and laypeople with an interest in the arts look like? What are the limitations and possibilities of attempting to educate and make evident diversity within the community of supplier and consumers through celebration?

### **Cultural Development: Celebrating Culture through the Arts**

Juan Perez, Cultural Development Officer, Campbelltown City Council

10.35am - 11.00am

#### **Networking**

**Julianne Hilbers**, Centre for Popular Education and

**Philbert Rochecouste**, Dolphiniumm

There are a range of people interested in celebrations. Which group do you align with: academia, government, non government, private, community?

There are a range of people you may facilitate celebrations with and for. Which group of people does your celebration work focus on: personal network, individuals, community, business, organisations?

What is your major source of inspiration for example, traditional celebrations or the group you are working with?

11.00am to 11.30am

#### **Break**

11.30am - 12.30am

**Panel Discussion:**

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How can we build support for celebration practice?

Chair: **Johnny Allen**, Centre for Event Management, UTS

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**Scott Ohara**, Community Cultural Development NSW

**Rob Harris**, Centre for Event Management, UTS

WHAT ARE THE DEFINING FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE CELEBRATION PRACTICE?

**Rick Flowers**, Centre for Popular Education, UTS

Does the answer to this question depend on what purpose is being prioritised with the celebration? What are the different purposes celebrations serve? Is it too simplistic .... too atomistic as opposed to holistic..... to suggest the following categories of purpose?

- β Personal identity and development
- β Cultural identity, cultural development and community building
- β Artistic achievement
- β Health and environmental education
- β Economic development, in particular tourism
- β Spiritual and religious worship
- β Fun and entertainment

I think that celebrations can serve multiple purposes but inevitably some purposes are more valued than others. This is one dimension of the contestation that surrounds celebration practices.

In Darling Harbour over Easter there will be a major program of street theatre and celebration events. I suspect that the major purpose shaping the Darling Harbour program is economic and tourism development. In Wauchope, there are plans to convene the Bago Festival of Puppetry and Storytelling in 2003. Like the Darling Harbour events the Bago Festival is shaped by a desire to foster more tourism and economic development. But it is likely that the Bago Festival will also be shaped by a desire to achieve a purpose that is more difficult to define – namely, cultural identity, cultural development and community building. This is because the Port Macquarie Region has been awarded City of the Arts funding. That, in turn, has raised the profile of arts and culture and challenged a planning culture in the local government authority concerned predominantly with tourism and economic development.

So, to return to the leading question of this session: What are the defining features of effective celebration practice? If economic and tourism development are your main concern you might highlight the following features:

- ▲ Was it marketed and promoted well?
- ▲ Did it include activities that attract large numbers of people?
- ▲ Did it create jobs?

This isn't my area of expertise; so, I'll say no more. I am going to focus on celebration practice for community building and cultural development.

Let's sketch how one might co-ordinate a research and evaluation effort about the Bago Festival in Wauchope. (PopEd has, in fact, been invited to help Hastings Council draw up research and evaluation plans).

Ideally any research and evaluation should include questions about economic development. But here I will focus on questions of cultural and community development.

Wauchope is a township about 20 kms inland from Port Macquarie. It was formerly the centre of a thriving timber and rural industry. These industries have changed and for Wauchope it has meant the loss of jobs. A recent report commissioned by the Port Hastings Council said "there is no indication of any investment in the town and a sense of anger, frustration and disillusionment." Wauchope experiences high levels of social fragmentation. There are the timber folk, the dairy folk, Aboriginal communities, and a growing number of creative arts folk.

So against this background, what constitutes effective practice for planning and managing the Bago Festival for Puppetry and Storytelling in 2003? Here is a preliminary framework developed by me and staff at Hastings Council.

### **Clarity and transparency of goals and interests**

- ♣ Where did the original idea for expanding the Bago Festival and celebration come from?
- ♣ Who plays a leading role in defining the Festival goals and concepts?
- ♣ Are the goals and interests able to be negotiated and further developed? Are the different goals and interests of diverse stakeholder groups respected?

### **Engagement and participation**

How can celebration practice be made democratic and participatory? Who plans and controls the planning and management of the Festival? Are there groups who are less included than others? Why?

What does participation mean? Or more specifically, what constitutes a desirable level of participation in the Bago Festival? Is participation to be measured by how many meetings you attend, or how much volunteer time you invest in production and organising, or the quality of creative input?

What would count as a desirable number of people to participate?

What strategies are used to foster participation in the Bago Festival? There is an infinite variety of ways to foster participation. How effective and appropriate are they for a particular project? There is contestation about what strategies are effective and appropriate. It is therefore useful when event and celebration practitioners can clearly define the nature of their strategies. The following schema might help.

What models of engagement and participation characterise the Bago Festival?

- β Travelling players - hired professionals work with members of the community to create the festival.

- β The agency - a group of professionals undertake planning, production and management according to a brief.
- β The artistic hero - a group of artists work together on the artistic director's vision.
- β The masterclass - a tireless artistic director builds a group of volunteers into semi-professional celebration practitioners and performers.
- β The tapestry - a group of volunteers co-operate to plan and manage the celebration together.
- β The cargo cult – the event and celebration concept is imported from outside the region.
- ♣ The studio and workshop - studios and workshops open to all in which individuals motivate themselves to produce their own celebration activities, with guidance where necessary.

### **Community bonding and identity building**

Wauchope is a small and diverse community. What role, if any, is the Bago Festival playing in bringing the diverse elements of the community together? Is the Bago celebration helping to develop a sense of identity that supersedes the various identities people currently have .... There are the timber folk and the creative arts folk and there is mistrust between them but the Bago Festival helps build a new relationship and new trust between them?

### **Learning and Change**

Do these new relationships in turn help create more opportunities where different 'tribes' are willing to learn and work together? What role does the celebration play in this?

What sort of learning might the Bago Festival support and facilitate? There will be learning of various technical skills. Might the Bago Festival bring the diverse parts of Wauchope to a higher level of interaction and understanding of each others' problems and perspectives? Will the Bago Festival strengthen energy and further encourage people to 'ask why'? ..... to develop their own analyses of the challenges facing Wauchope rather than relying on outside consultants?

Do the participants have changed views about themselves, others, and nominated issues?

Do some believe that the celebration has contributed to more than individual change, but also cultural or social change? What's the basis of their assertions?

### **Creating**

Art, in particular puppetry and storytelling, is central to the Bago Festival.

What art is being created? How would different stakeholders approach this question - arts workers, residents, art critics, policy managers, art academics, health academics ?

What sort of reflections and comments do residents and other stakeholders have about the artistic quality of the Festival? Quality is, of course, a subjective notion. It is the subjective understandings that I suggest be documented.

What role do practitioners play in creating the art?

What role do the participants play in creating the art?

How effectively do the practitioners plan and enable a collaborative process of creation?

How effectively do the participants plan and enable a collaborative process of creation?

Who controls and owns the art?

### **Leadership and community initiative/control**

Is it possible that as a result of the Bago Festival a stronger and larger group of community leaders will emerge? Imagine if a traditional community leadership program with workshops was run in Wauchope. The goals of traditional community leadership include helping people learn skills in vision setting, strategic planning, mobilising people etc. Is it possible that a group of people involved in planning and organising the Bago Festival could learn these sorts of skills more effectively than if they attended workshops?

### **Concluding comment about Singapore**

We hope that this framework will help us undertake research that will deepen our understanding of what are the defining features of effective celebration practice. But in my concluding comments I want to allude to the complexity of how philosophy and politics shapes celebration practices.

Think of celebrations in Singapore. Local festivals and community celebrations are supported to a degree by the government that would make us envious. In Singapore, all the community workers I interviewed emphasised how celebration activities are a means to an end, and the 'end' which they highlighted was community bonding. A critic puts a blunter perspective forward. He says:

The celebration of festivals and the occasional street carnivals organised by the government have about them an air, not of enjoyment but of purpose. "We are celebrating because we have been asked to do so." It is not without significance that the Minister for Information and the Arts said: "Fun is a serious business" .

But the critic's depiction of festival organising is too black and white. It is simplistic to say that celebrations in Singapore are propaganda activities. Community workers employed by the People's Association in Singapore see the process of organising a festival as a participatory planning activity. They are intent on helping residents learn to be more trusting and co-operative with each other. They do support efforts of residents and local community development committees to be actively engaged in identifying problems and proposing strategies to address them. They want residents to develop further pride in their local neighbourhoods.

So, there is lot of common ground between celebration practice in Singapore and Australia. The differences only emerge when celebration practitioners encourage

residents to imagine alternative ways of influencing social and community change beyond petitioning the ruling party.

#### WHO DOESN'T LIKE A GOOD PARTY?

**Michelle Hall**, NSW Local Government & Shires Association

Before I commence I would like to thank the Caddiegal people for allowing me here today, on their land, to speak to you. We are here today to talk about celebrations the success and the frustration but nothing could be more frustrating than to have been practicing community cultural development in the true context, of which celebration is a part, for 60,000 plus years and still be trying to have your people, places and processes acknowledged. If we are here to discuss the defining features of effective celebration practice then we need go no further than to look at the aboriginal culture. Their spiritual strength and integrity towards themselves, their communities and their environment is something we should all strive for.

I work for the peak industry body for local government in NSW, The Local Government and Shires Associations, whose membership includes the 172 local governments, 13 Regional Aboriginal Lands Councils and 18 special purpose county councils.

Cultural Development, in our context, involves numerous council functions, including not only arts, entertainment and cultural programs but also community services, facilities, urban and landscape design, heritage conservation, parks and recreation, planning and development controls. Cultural resources of a community are also extremely diverse including formal and informal cultural activities, natural and built environments, as well as public and commercial, cultural and entertainment facilities.

One of the main strategies the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW has undertaken in the past five years is to utilise creativity and arts practice to assist in the social and economic development of communities. In 1997 The Associations commenced what has proved to be an extremely effective partnership with the state government, through the NSW Ministry for the Arts.

The Associations recognised

- Through cultural activities every citizen, regardless of who they are, can play a role in reactivating the spirit of their community.
- Many social, economic and environmental benefits can be obtained by integrating cultural development within the local government framework.
- Cultural development provides the opportunity for local government and their communities to collaborate to address the issues facing their community.
- It essentially provides the opportunity for every citizen to feel a sense of place and actively contribute to the growth of that community.

By exploring their communities past, present and future identity, Local Government can then uncover the spirit and distinctiveness of a community thus the task of cohesive, vibrant and sustainable communities becomes achievable.

The partnership, between local and state government, has advanced the integration of cultural development within the local government framework .

One of Local Governments most important roles is to encourage community involvement and participation in public life for all citizens therefore ensuring integrated and sustainable outcomes. And in conjunction with that for the depth of

cultural diversity and creative energy in NSW to be recognized and celebrated, thus benefiting society as a whole.

It is about recognizing the unique cultural diversity local and regional communities have. Understanding and experiencing these cultures through celebrations leads to the development of the vibrancy and spirit of a community. It is essential to recognize that each community can and should define its own culture according to its interests, resources and needs. It is about identifying local distinctiveness and embracing it.

Local Government, therefore, has the responsibility to represent and provide leadership for its culturally diverse communities.

From our childhood, we are taught that celebrations are a time for people to come together, with lots of color and movement, food galore, some tantrums and the occasion accident. And at the end of it all, we have a great time, feel sick from lack of sleep and too much excitement for one person to fathom but feel a sense of contentment and peace and most of all feel a part of something pretty special and that is community.

In the 1999 community planning and services audit, amongst responding councils a significant number support Festivals and Celebrations by

- providing subsidies or donations (45%),
- by providing advice (27%),
- participating in management 27%- and just so you can draw some comparison to other areas - participating in management for sporting areas 17%, 12% for the parks and gardens area
- Provision of administrative support (26%).

Some councils support Festivals and Celebrations by providing building or office space (17%), providing land (15%) and meeting power and other utilities (13%)— why are these figures higher than say the support for swimming pools , because in this day and age it is basically the only activity where people can come together, be together and celebrate who they are and where they live. Whether it is the local show or a specific theme celebration, it is all about people. NSW Councils are actively undertaking celebration practice, if there is a party to be had, local government will be there is some capacity. From a reduction in law and order issues to the regeneration of a central business district, celebration practice assists local government and its communities to participate in strengthening its own future. Celebrations are extremely important to communities as they provide the opportunity for people to re discover who they are. Where they live and to feel a part of something. In this day and age of increasing work and family demands, the opportunity to interact with neighbours, people within your community is extremely limited. Also the stresses placed upon ones life, inhibits effective social interaction. Celebrations allow people to become a participant within their community simply by attending and immersing themselves into what should be an unique experience. So celebrating is extremely important to local government as it is contributes to community ownership and well being which thus results in safer more cohesive communities who are proud of their identity.

For me, as someone who has worked in local government for the past ten years, at a local, regional, state, I see a significant change in how local government engages with its communities and how it is willing to explore its identity, what makes it unique and to provide the opportunity for community to come together and celebrate. But I am not naive, local government does need guidance, support and

resources in regards to process and it is our role and responsibilities as practitioners to do this.

Our first responsibility is to ensure that the celebration addresses both the identified community need and embraces an element or elements of a communities past, present and or future identity. It is not an event for the sake of an event.

The second is that it appropriately represents and engages the community. Are aboriginal people within the community happy to be represented by merely opening and doing a dance at the beginning that represents their past, or would they like to be represented in their contemporary context, or maybe they would like to make a statement about their spiritual and social role in the community? Are the multi-cultural communities happy to be represented in their past tense also or would they like to opportunity to explore and represent their present identity within the community? It is really important that appropriate processes take place and that we are not merely undertaking a tokenistic approach because it is seen as the politically correct thing to do or to merely say that the festival covered all aspects of society. It is important that those people who are participating are included in the beginning of the planning process, as well as those with whom the idea originated. .

When we talk about effectiveness, how do you measure effectiveness with celebration? What is your objective going into an event – is it merely to say that you did something for Australia day – in which 20 people running around a swimming pool on the 26<sup>th</sup> January can be regarded as an effective outcome or is it part of a community revitalisation process, in which the celebration identifies an issue and develops processes to address the issue whether it be social or economic. For me, the main indicator that a celebration is effective is if the communities are engaged at the beginning of the process and if they are still around at the end of it, because it means that they have had ownership, both of the process and celebration.

And finally

How can you build support for celebration practice within local government?

Demonstrate the need, the community desire and the relevance. If you can do this, you will no doubt get the support of local government. Local Government is not going to support a \$60,000 butterfly festival in some obscure location but it will support a celebration that meets an identified community need, has a clear objective, processes and can clearly demonstrate social and / or economic benefits for that local government area.

Local Governments role is to merely facilitate the communities' aspirations and provide leadership for and on behalf of its communities. It is not necessarily the case that it has to develop and implement creativity within the community. That is the communities' role in partnership with local government.

And finally, before I go, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those tireless employee's of local government who manage to facilitate all those community celebrations across NSW. Your celebration , however small it may be, has assisted in shaping the way that community functions. You are the ones that find the money, work with the community , deal with all the obscure difficulties imaginable and live off panadol. Without you, where in the world would we be!

CELEBRATION PRACTICE IN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE NSW

**Victoria Keighery**, Regional Arts NSW

Over the last 5 months, if not before now, we at Regional Arts NSW have become dramatically aware of what defines 'effective' celebration practice in rural, regional and remote NSW, and of some of the elements we need to build to support it. What has recently shaped our heightened awareness will become evident as I go on. I will say here that many of these comments are not likely to be part of your experience if you are from a metropolitan area or, indeed, from cities like Wollongong and Newcastle. But if you have experienced rural and remote regions, you will know these things innately and absolutely.

There are several inter-dependent features of community celebratory endeavours that seem to be really obvious, but that bear re-stating because they are so fundamental to any arts and cultural practice in the regions, although, I hope I have not oversimplified them:

#### Feature No 1: The Dream.

Before a celebration reflects or even takes into account local identity, community preferences or strategies needed to ensure that it is effective, a vision has to be voiced and, indeed, sold to at least a couple of other people. Notably that vision is usually the contribution of one or two people, particularly in rural, regional and remote NSW communities. Building the vision into an actual celebration, of course, relies on the resonance it has with other people in the community. But at the outset, someone has to dream of the possibilities and believe that they are worth sharing.

Where the celebration started from, and where it ends up, is the direct result of the environment in which it seeks the mechanisms to grow beyond the vision to the reality. At this point, there may be no clear purpose for such a celebration because it has been born in the mind or minds of people with social and artistic preferences - for whatever purposes they each have in the first instances. In fact the dream may absolutely defy logic and, indeed, I would suggest that this may be a critical element in the creative process because we have all, over recent years and indeed months, had our capacity to celebrate, just because it feels good, seriously challenged.

This part of celebration practice, the capacity to dream, subjective though it may be, is inherently voluntary and entirely human.

#### Feature No 2: The Wherewithal

In rural, regional and remote NSW, having the dream is ultimately the feature that is the greatest strength for community celebrations practice because it can, and does, engage people, but by the same token, it requires the greatest leap of faith for communities. In most rural, regional and remote communities it relies in all instances on the persistence and dedication of local volunteers. No matter how many professionals are employed on the project, it is ultimately down to the community based, not-for-profit arts and cultural groups to provide a basis on which the celebration relies and this basis is absolutely a fine thread between the dream and the reality. It is often shaky and ill-defined because it is a human foundation.

It needs to be stated that in most areas of the state outside the metropolitan base, there is minimal to no arts infrastructure: professional gallery staff, arts administrators, project co-ordinators, arts planners, financial managers, production staff, marketeers and sponsorship specialists are few on the ground. That means that proposals are made, applications filled out, artists contracted, marketing and publicity done, sponsorship raised, venues booked, tickets taken, budgets done, children cared for, lanterns placed, tables wiped and scaffolding built by arts

volunteers, before the talent arrives and the show goes on. These are also inherently volunteer activities driven by a human need.

Which brings me to

Feature No 3: The nuts and bolts.

The wherewithal to dream is part of how communities can relate to one another, it is true, but the wherewithal to fulfil the dream is a less tangible and more humanly limiting feature than we make allowances for: those of us who have access to ready made specialised expertise are often frustrated by the limited nature of volunteers filling out application forms, acknowledging grants and doing reports.

A recurrent theme in all the work we undertake at Regional Arts NSW is that of regionally sensitive capacity building: regionally sensitive because all the regions are different, particularly in relation to arts infrastructure. Our work with the 11 Regional Arts Development Officers and Regional Arts Boards across the state is defined by this. However, even the professional artswriters in the regions are dependent on the work of arts volunteers in their regions to enact the dream and while regional determinism is the inherent philosophy of Regional Arts NSW we are consummately aware of what is a shifting relationship between people with the dream and the realities of available resources to fulfil it. When I look at how many community celebrations are occurring in NSW I am astounded at the sheer bulk of them. Longstanding arts festivals such as the Woodford Arts Festival, Mudgee Wine and Food Festival, Tamworth Music Festival, etc. that have become part of an urban exodus to rural areas are important landmarks for an increasingly sophisticated professional network of regional activity that has a locally distinctive base. But when we delve into the histories of these festivals we will find frequently recurring names associated with them, and they are not necessarily professional artswriters. With regional community celebrations the nuts and bolts are provided by these people over lifetimes of dedication and local capacity building is also largely a voluntary activity in these cases.

Just some volunteer statistics for those of you who like them:

- Regional Arts NSW has a state board of 12 volunteer directors comprising nominees from each of 11 regions and one co-opted member.
- Regional Arts Boards comprise volunteer directors numbering 120 across the state.
- Local arts councils comprise over 800 volunteer committee members.
- An additional 300 arts and cultural groups associated with our network would add hundreds more to this number.

And that's just the committee infrastructure.

- Our network of Regional Arts Development Officers alone is directly responsible for over 150 arts and cultural projects each year that involve the work of volunteers.
- They are indirectly involved in an additional 300 projects per year - again with volunteers involved in establishing and running the projects at the local level.
- The audience base for these projects is around a million people.
- At least 1 significant public artwork or street upgrade occurs in each of the 14 regions in the state per year from community murals to street pavers and commemorative bollards - the work of volunteers, again, is essential to these projects.

- At least 3 local arts and cultural festivals, invested in by local government and local business, employing local artists and performers and involving networks of volunteers occur in each region per year.

All of these projects, directly related to the RANSW network alone, celebrate life in rural and regional NSW and speak of a highly effective volunteer capacity to generate and implement local arts and cultural activities in the regions.

However, there are some nuts and bolts that have been eroded over time and are constantly in a state of flux because of the environment in which we live.

- Our most precious and fundamental resource, the arts volunteer network, is generally an aging population and we are currently witnessing a drop in their numbers. Some 10 local arts councils have ceased operating over the last two years because they are unable to attract new volunteers to carry on the work of increasingly older and less mobile community members. Those people who would have taken up the baton of voluntarism, namely women, are dependent on earning an income from, most often, full time work. That is, those who have the social and educational capacity to take up voluntary work in the first place. While there are other groups forming, they are not doing so in direct relation to the numbers ceasing to operate. When they go, they take with them not only group capacity but often, the dream.
- The spiraling costs of community celebrations have rendered many groups incapable of taking such large financial risks with no reserves in place and increasing competition for funding. This is often the last straw for those community members who have laboured most of their lives to provide community celebrations.
- The increased bureaucratisation of arts funding from all sources and the sheer number of forms to be filled out, people to seek permission from, documents to obtain and state and local programming expectations wears down the willingness and motivation to proceed with community celebrations.

And this brings me to the most recently eroded nuts and bolts: public liability insurance.

Bearing in mind that up until the HIH collapse and the impact that the events of September 11 has had on the insurance industry, Regional Arts NSW has been unable to obtain more than 1 quote for its blanket public liability and volunteer worker accident policy, provided for over 20 years to local arts councils in NSW. That quote represented an increase of 880% - it went from \$16,000 to \$180,000 per annum. This has impacted severely on the volunteer arts sector in regional NSW to the extent that local arts councils and Regional Arts Boards have, in some instance, not been able to conduct their AGMs. With a constitutional requirement for them to do so, and a requirement from the Department of Fair Trading to cease operations if they do not have public liability insurance, this has resulted in hundreds of local celebrations being cancelled or postponed. To name a few that have been cancelled or postponed:

- Tweed Valley Arts Council's Inaugural Easter Exhibition.
- The Tilba Festival, one of the largest gatherings in the region, a twenty year old annual arts and community event that attracts 13,000.
- Coolamon Shire Arts Council's Easter performances.

- Nyngan Arts Council's Outback Shearers Festival - now being auspiced by Local Council.
- Arts North West's Musica Viva workshop series.
- Inverell Arts Society's gallery has been closed.
- Glen Innes Arts Council's cinema operations have been closed.
- The Valley Community Arts gallery is closed.
- Blayney Arts Council's Easter Exhibition - cancelled.
- Dorriggo Arts Council's Annual Easter Art Exhibition, Arts and Crafts Market, concerts, circus events, lantern festival and workshops - cancelled.
- Music in the Park at Congo - a 6 year old event - cancelled.
- Nambucca Valley Arts Council's Valentines Night Concert - their fundraiser for the year has been cancelled.
- The Olympia Theatre in Bombala has cancelled their weekly cinema program and blue light disco.

And many, many other arts and cultural events are at risk.

So we get back to capacity: what is happening with public liability has nothing to do with the fundamental features of community celebrations, but out of the blue, has pulled all the other nuts and bolts out of the structure. And, because it is all to do with the insurance industry itself, and government does not seem to be able to bring them in to line, there is nothing we can do other than to make sure that people know what is at stake. For us it is the capacity for regional communities to celebrate together.

It seems ludicrous that, with only 1 claim against our Public Liability in over 50 years, and a minimal one at that, such a previously small budget item can tip everything upside down and put the well-being of communities at risk.

So, to summarise:

The three defining features of effective celebration practice for rural, regional and remote NSW, from my perspective, are:

- The Dream
- The Wherewithal, and,
- The Nuts and Bolts.

These three are fundamental to what ever has to happen beyond them to get the show on the road.

And in finishing, I would propose that, to support the practice of celebration in regional NSW, we:

- Acknowledge the contribution that volunteers make, and have made, to community celebrations.
- Provide mechanisms that support the fragile nature of human endeavour at the volunteer level: try to make it easier, rather than harder each year.
- Accommodate the need for fewer restraints and demands on volunteers involved in community celebrations, or at least, nurture their increase of skills rather than demand and expect them at the outset.
- Recognise the human toll of the corporatisation of government services, and the economic dominance of industry, and find ways to help resolve the current impediments to local arts and cultural volunteers.

And lastly ....

- Support the importance of having the Dream in celebration practice.

**Scott Ohara**, Community Cultural Development NSW

What makes a successful celebration? Three key points

1. Appropriate community engagement
2. Planning, planning and more planning
3. Knowing why you are having a celebration, and measuring your success against that purpose.

12.30pm - 1.30pm

**Lunch**

There are a number of eateries around the venue you can choose from.

1.30pm - 2.30pm

**Case Study: Celebrating Community Work**

**Susan Ambler, Debbie Horsfall, Judy Pinn, Lesley Sammon, Lizzie Vesely, Mary Waterford**

Critical analysis of a case study: Why celebrations were used; What impact it had; How barriers were addressed. Questions invited.

2.30pm to 3.00pm

**Celebrating with music and movement**

**Suzanne Mitten-Lewis**, Creative Dance

In honour of World Water Day, this presentation features a dance that celebrates two aspects of water: flowing and splashing. Participants will learn “Wisheetah,” a Native American water chant that Brooke Medicine Eagle of the Crow people has granted us permission to use. This chant, like much indigenous American music, employs onomatopoeia to invoke the qualities of water, using the words “Wisheetah” and “Washah.”

To accompany the singing, participants will learn a delightful circle dance, lively but not aerobic. Simple movements express both graceful flow and playful splashing, and remind us of our primordial kinship with water, which comprises over 70% of the substance of our bodies. The novelist Kurt Vonnegut Jr. wrote that water invented human beings as a means of transport (*Cat’s Cradle*); inspired by this point of view, we might describe this dance as a means by which water celebrates itself through the medium of our bodies.

In the form of community dancing shared in this session, there are no performers or audience, and the focus is on experiential process rather than aesthetic product. The experience develops through the collaboration of the entire circle, and thus can serve as a paradigm of a way of working in community.

Singing and dancing are nearly universal human activities, which in contemporary society have been relegated to specialised contexts that remove them from the participation of non-specialists. As a consequence, many Australians become very self-conscious and embarrassed if asked to sing, let alone dance! It can be useful to ask oneself, “What is it that prevents me from joining the dance? What do I fear will happen if I join the dance? Why do I give that fear the power to dictate my choices?”

“Wisheetah” is one of a body of hundreds of dances collectively known as “Dances of Universal Peace,” dedicated to promoting peace through artistic expression. Dance circles meet regularly in more than 20 countries world-wide, sharing songs and movements drawn from diverse cultures across the planet. These dances are a

feature of the yearly American Holistic Medicine Association conference and have been presented at environmental gatherings, peace events, folk festivals; in such diverse places as: churches, synagogues, forests, and town squares.

The dance session at the Community Celebrations Forum is presented by Suzanne Mitten-Lewis, a member of the Mentor Teachers Guild of the Dances of Peace, the world-wide network that oversees training and certification of dance leaders and musicians.

3.00pm – 3.10pm

**Break**

3.10pm – 4.00pm

**Information Exchange**

**Tricia Cooney**, Circus Solaris

Community Street Festivals: Lessons from Europe

**Paul Brown**, School of Science and Technology, UNSW

Adelaide Festival: Maralinga Project

‘Converge’

Open invitation to participants

4.00pm – 4.50pm

**Seasonal Celebrations: Autumn Equinox**

**Glenys Livingstone**, Phd Seasonal Celebrations

The Autumnal Equinox is a sacred moment of balance, a moment of equilibrium. Light and dark parts of the day are of equal length for a moment, with the balance about to tip into the dark. It is a season of harvest, and a time for letting go. It is a time to celebrate the balancing of light and dark - the joy of abundant life, and the grief of loss - the cost involved with the getting of this wisdom/"harvest".

This short ritual celebration of the Autumn Equinox is based on the story of Demeter and Persephone - the Eleusinian Mysteries, and as with any great story, it includes the echoes of many other stories. The Mysteries of Eleusis was a nine day ritual celebration of Mother and Daughter that took place annually for 2000 years, at Eleusis in Greece. These Mysteries were thought to hold the entire human race together - partly because people came from every corner of the Earth to be initiated. We will allude to that in the ceremony.

In the ancient Icon, Demeter hands Persephone the wheat; it is the sacred passing on of Knowledge/Wisdom/Life itself - the sacred Thread of life, represented in the Seed, the Wheat.

The Seed, the Wheat, represents a harvest of Life we are given - it is handed to us. We may rejoice in it and give thanks. But like the Seed that goes into the Earth, every moment of Life is Lost - it dissolves, and is never repeated. Every moment in our lives and in the entire history of Gaia-Universe is never repeated - it is lost. That means it is also ever-new. That is the Mystery - it is lost, but it is ever-new. There is a place on that Edge - of the grief and the joy, where the Universe hums in balance - a creative tension (some would call it the curvature of space-time). It is what enables Creativity to go on \_ in our lives and in

the Cosmos. This may be represented by the Seed, the "Persephone" that goes down into the Dark Earth, and will sprout yet again.

Bring a small food offering to represent your "harvest" - all that you have gained. We will be sharing it as part of the ceremony.

4.50pm – 5.00pm

The next adventure....

**Julianne Hilbers**, Centre for Popular Education

What would you like addressed in future forums?

# Notes on Presenters / Facilitators

## **Johnny Allen**

Johnny Allen is the Director of the Australian Centre for Event Management (ACEM), a centre devoted to training and research in event management at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). He teaches in the Executive Certificate in Event Management course at UTS, and is co-author of 'Festival and Special Event Management' published by John Wiley and Sons in 1999 and 'The Regional Event Management Handbook' published by ACEM in 2002.

Johnny was Special Events Manager for Tourism New South Wales from 1996 -1998, where he devised and implemented an Events Strategy for the State of New South Wales on behalf of the State Government. He set up and serviced a whole-of-government Major Events Advisory Committee, as well as supervising the Regional Flagship Events and Sydney Hallmark Events Programs.

From 1989 - 1996, Johnny was Special Events Manager for the Darling Harbour Authority, where he devised and implemented an event led marketing strategy for Darling Harbour. The program included nearly a thousand events per year, and positioned Darling Harbour as the place 'where Sydney celebrates'.

Prior to this, Johnny coordinated Newcastle's Celebrations of Australia's Bicentenary in 1998, including the Bicentennial State Festival of Music, and was director of the Mattara Festival of Newcastle from 1985 - 1986.

Johnny is the author of the Entertainment Arts in Australia, published by Paul Hamlyn in 1968, and The Kids Catalogue, published by Greenhouse Publications in 1975.

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## **Annie Bolitho**

Annie Bolitho is a candidate in the Doctorate of Creative Arts Program at UTS. In the light of her interests as Mermaid and Flow Engineer she is supervised by a writer, and by a scientist in the Institute for Sustainable Futures. The Mermaid has appeared regularly as a street performer at Woodford Folk Festival as a member of the Doll-fins. The Flow Engineer keeps up a strong interest in contemporary developments in the water field. Together they create a strong presence, inspiring new perspectives on water through story, writing and the facilitation of events celebrating communities and water.

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## **Paul Brown**

Paul is a lecturer at the School of Science and Technology Studies, UNSW and Coordinator of the Environmental Studies Program. His interests include:

- Indonesia's nuclear program
- International waste trade
- The Green Movement in Australia
- Environmental education

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**Tricia Cooney**

Tricia Cooney has worked as a Celebrations Artist for 20 years, conducting community workshops in many aspects of (mainly outdoor) celebration and carnival performance. For the last 13 years she has been a performer and director with street theatre group, Circus Solarus, which also has also had a commitment to working at a community level to devise celebrations, particularly in our local area and the western suburbs.

In addition to this professional work Tricia has an active interest in regional arts development through contributing to arts strategy development, serving on the board of CCD NSW, local arts committees and is currently working with Johnny Allen from UTS Centre for Event Management on a conference and practical workshops in festival creation.

In 2001 she undertook a Churchill Fellowship study tour to Italy, France and England looking at Carnival, community involvement in Celebration, as well as some Urban Regeneration through the Arts projects in NW England.

At present Circus Solarus is looking to set up a Celebrations Resource and Creation centre in the Western suburbs and would welcome talks with other groups with an interest in this area.

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**Rick Flowers**

Rick Flowers is Director of the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology, Sydney and Program Director of Masters degrees in the Faculty of Education. UTS is internationally renowned for the strength and the considerable size of its research and teaching programs in community education. The Centre for Popular Education fosters and undertakes research in environmental education and advocacy, cultural action, health education and community development, the pedagogy and politics of working with young people, and community leadership. Rick's teaching responsibilities are mainly in the area of non-formal education, curriculum and development studies.

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**Michelle Hall – O'Connor**

Funded by the NSW Ministry for the Arts and employed by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW, peak industry body for local government in NSW - responsible for facilitating policy development and capacity building in cultural development with the membership (172 Local Governments and 13 Regional Aboriginal Land Councils in NSW). Previous to this was Regional Arts Development Officer - Outback Arts.

Interest in celebrations - who doesn't like a good party .

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**Rob Harris**

Rob Harris is a Senior Lecturer, and Director of Continuing Education at the School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism at the University of Technology, Sydney. Rob has been involved in event management, training and research for the past five years, and has developed undergraduate, postgraduate and TAFE programs in the area. He is currently the course director of the Executive Certificate in Event Management at UTS, and a member of the management committee of the Australian Centre for

Event Management. In 1999, Rob was contracted to develop a three year Tourism Events Strategy for the Kingdom of Tonga, with a focus on the opportunities presented by the Millennium. Rob is also a foundation director of the NSW Festivals and Events Association for which he has presented a number of seminar sessions on the topic of event marketing.

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### **Julianne Hilbers**

Julianne is a Phd student at UTS and research fellow with the Centre for Popular Education. She also works part time with the NSW Health as a Diversity Health Coordinator. Julianne is a registered psychologist, adult educator and has been a health promotion practitioner for over 10 years. Julianne is interested in how celebrations can positively contribute to the health of individuals, organisations and communities. Julianne is the inspiration behind and coordinator of this series of forums.

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### **Victoria Keighery**

Victoria Keighery has worked in the arts since 1979 including positions with the Crafts Councils of Australia and NSW, the Australia Council, NSW Community Arts Association, Community Arts Marrickville, Creative Cultures in Western Sydney and Arts Training Australia.

Prior to taking up the position of CEO for Regional Arts NSW in March 2000, she was the Cultural Policy Officer for the City of Sydney. From 1989 to 2000 she has worked as an arts and cultural consultant undertaking conferences, research, policy development and publication, management reviews and strategic planning with organisations such as Accessible Arts, NAVA, Ausglass and the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. She has conducted arts and cultural planning for Mackay City Council, Drummoyne and Ryde City Councils.

She holds a Grad Dip and Master of Arts (Arts Management) from the University of Technology, Sydney, and has lectured part-time at UTS, COFA and NAISDA. She has developed community cultural development accredited curricula and tutored for the NSW Community Arts Association.

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### **Glenys Livingstone**

Glenys Livingstone recently completed her doctoral research on the celebration of the Female Metaphor/Gaia in Seasonal Ritual as a Catalyst for Personal and Cultural Change. Glenys has integrated her indigenous Western European Earth spiritual tradition with the work of physicist Brian Swimme and cultural historian Thomas Berry. Glenys has taught many adult education courses, writes, lectures casually at the University of Western Sydney in Ecological Psychology, and facilitates seasonal ritual celebrations.

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### **Annette Maie (Rups-Eyland)**

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**Suzanne Mitten-Lewis**

Suzanne Mitten-Lewis has conducted health services research for the past 30 years. In parallel, she has pursued her passion for the expression of human experience through movement, in a variety of forms. After 8 years as a nationally-ranked Karate instructor, a knee injury forced her to seek a less strenuous way of working, and she became involved in the Dances of Peace. These meditative group dances provide a direct experience of harmonious cooperation, where all members of the circle collaborate in creating an atmosphere of joy and peace. It was a pleasant change from punching and kicking people. Over the ensuing 20 years she became an internationally-recognised choreographer and teacher-trainer, with students in Australia and the US.

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**Juan Perez**

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**Scott Ohara**

Scott O'Hara began his professional life as a classical archaeologist. The attraction of life as a professional backpacker in the Middle East soon wore off, however, so he returned to Australia, where he began a serious career in arts administration and education in order to support his low-profile as a singer songwriter. After stints rebuilding and professionalising the Suzuki Talent Education Association and Triathlon NSW, Scott spent nearly 5 years working for the Australia Council. Scott is currently CEO of Community Cultural Development NSW, where he pursues the promotion and development of community culture, particularly in terms of community control and developmental aspects of cultural activity. He holds a Masters in Management from UTS and has partly completed a PhD on Music policy.

His interest in celebrations is primarily in how they can provide a vehicle for cultural development through active engagement with communities.

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**Gilbert Rochcouste**

Born on the island of Mauritius. Gilbert is known for his colourful style and approach in facilitating community and urban renewal projects, Gilbert uses celebration as a tool for social change, community and environmental renewal.

He has created the Gaslight night market, managed the Spiral dance parties creating a safe and sacred space for the celebration of life. Gilbert uses rituals and celebration as a form to re-connect people and communities. These tools are used to move forward, towards a new integral and life nourishing and affirming story.

Gilbert also founded the EPOCH foundation (Promoting the adoption of ethical and spirited values in business). He is the director of Dolphiumm and Village Well a firm specialising in community, urban renewal and communications.

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**Susan Ambler / Debbie Horsfall / Judy Pinn / Lesley Sammon / Lizzie Vesely / Mary Waterford**

An alliance of paid and unpaid community and environmental activists, students and academics.

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**David Wright**

David Wright is a lecturer in the School of Social Ecology and Lifelong Learning in the University of Western Sydney. He has a long standing interest in learning through immersion in experience. His current interest is emotion and consciousness. Hopefully, this explains his interest in celebration.

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