

ARTSOUND AND ME 10.01.23.

Firstly I'd like to thank Betsy and the Board for organising this gathering, and all of you for coming along. It was most unexpected but very much appreciated.'

Having made the momentous (for me) decision to retire from broadcasting, I've spent some time reflecting my long association with Artsound.

I joined the "Dress Circle" team as a presenter, at the invitation of **Kathy Syrette** in 2003 when Artsound was based in Curtin and known as Canberra Stereo Public Radio.

Kathy was co-ordinating a team of four presenters who shared responsibility for presenting the live-to-air program, which at that time was focussed on playing music from Broadway shows, film and cabaret.

I enjoyed being part of the team presenting "**Dress Circle**" for the opportunity it provided to share my enthusiasm for the performing arts, and particularly the performing arts scene in Canberra.

Over the years the team dwindled. For a time the program was shared between **Clinton White, Tony Magee** and myself. Then Tony and I shared it until the end of 2010.

When Tony retired, **Len Power** took over Tony's mike, and shared the program with me until April 2013.

During that time the focus of the program gradually changed until, by the time I took over sole production and presenting responsibilities, the focus was specifically on the performing arts in Canberra, with interviews with local theatre practitioners, and those connected with shows touring to Canberra, becoming a feature of each program.

These interviews were important in that they provided theatre makers with the opportunity to share insights into what goes into creating the performances that enthral and entertain us.

As part of the team who contributed to each week's episode of "**Dress Circle**" - by this time proudly describing itself as "90 minutes of interviews, reviews, music and news about the performing arts in Canberra and beyond" - **Len Power** contributed a weekly theatre review - **Isobel Griffin** contributed a weekly theatre round-up - and bush poet, Blue the Shearer (the late **Col Wilson**) contributed a weekly satirical poem - Dance writer and critic, **Michelle Potter**, contributed a monthly segment, "**Michelle Potter on Dancing**".

By 2015 I decided to step away from the onerous task of producing and presenting a weekly program, and Len took over with a slightly modified version, renamed "**On Stage**" to which I contributed weekly interviews under the title "**Backstage**"

In 2016, Len relinquished “**On Stage**” to concentrate on producing his own very successful series “**Broadway By The Year**” - and I again became sole presenter of the program, now called “**In the Foyer**” and reformatted as a 30 minute program, still about the performing arts in Canberra and beyond, to which Len continued to provide a weekly review, while “**Red Velvet and Wild Boronia**” was given its own timeslot as a separate weekly program.

Both “**In the Foyer**” and “**Red Velvet and Wild Boronia**” aired uninterrupted through the 2020 lockdown until July 2021, when post lock-down, my interviews were absorbed as “**In the Foyer**” stand alone segments in “**Arts Café**” and “**Arts About**”.

Prior to being involved “**Dress Circle**”, my Artsound involvement had included the privilege of being, in May 1999, the first guest on **Bill Oakes** program “**Conversations**”, then in January 2004, the final one.

As a local theatre practitioner I had also had the opportunity to participate in some discussion panels on **Phil McKenzie’s** infamous “**Flea in Your Ear**” programs.

But my association with Artsound goes back even further. Indeed, as far back as **1987**, when **Phillip O’Brien** and **Chris Deacon** approached me for permission to record shows at our cabaret venue in Queanbeyan, **The School of Arts Café**. The idea being that these recordings would be played as radio programs by Canberra Stereo Public Radio.

I agreed, realising that such an arrangement would ensure additional exposure for the artists performing at the café and the opportunity for listeners unable to visit the café, to enjoy the performances, as I’d done with local programs I’d heard previously broadcast by Artsound. The only proviso being that the café would receive a copy of each recording for its archive.

From 1987 until the café closed in December, 2000, dozens of shows were recorded by enthusiastic teams of Artsound recordists. Among the most regular were **Laura Tchiligurian** now a senior broadcaster with the ABC in Sydney, Laura’s sister **Silvia Tchiligurian**, **Chris Deacon**, **Phillip O’Brien**, **Bill Oakes**, **Gulielma Patton**, **Annabel Wheeler** and **Colin Loughheed**.

Many of the programs were broadcast at the time, and others were archived.

By 1992 the Artsound teams had become so proficient in recording the shows, that it became possible to produce, in the Artsound studios, a CD series, “**Cabaret Legends At The School of Arts Café**” showcasing the performances of **Nancye Hayes**, **Toni Lamond**, and **Lorrae Desmond**, **Jeanne Little**, **Lynn Rogers**, **Donna Lee**, **Margret RoadKnight** and **Dennis Olsen**.

Nowadays, recordings of cabaret performances are common, but in 1992 the recordings made at The School of Arts Café were ground breaking. They were marketed to collectors

worldwide by **Larrikin Records**, receiving excellent reviews in Australian and overseas publications, and even a nomination for an Aria Award.

When the School of Arts Café closed at the end of 2000, **Phillip O'Brien** produced a one hour radio documentary on the café entitled "**Red Velvet and Wild Boronia: Fifteen Years of the School of Arts Café**" featuring highlights from those recordings.

For some years after The School of Arts Café closed, the idea of producing a series of radio programs from the School of Arts Café archives - as a way of sharing these recorded performances with a whole new audience - was a persistent pipe dream.

Then one day, during a chance conversation with **Len Power**, he expressed an interest in sharing his technical expertise with me to work on such a project.

So in blissful ignorance of the unsuspected terrors of program production, in January 2007, we began work on the series, retaining Phillip O'Brien's title "**Red Velvet and Wild Boronia**" and after much trial and error, produced 26 half-hour episodes, the first of which was broadcast by Artsound in April 2008.

Then, Artsound member, **Bert Whelan**, offered Artsound access to his huge collection of rare Gershwin recordings. Len and I put aside the "Red Velvet and Wild Boronia" series to turn our attention to the challenge of producing 26 one-hour episodes of a new series from Bert's archive, called "**The Gershwin Project**" which Len wrote and produced and I narrated.

This series played on Artsound from May to November 2009, as well as around Australia on the Community Radio Network. It was also broadcast by English-speaking countries throughout Europe, and a copy is held in the **Library of Congress in Washington**.

Meanwhile, Len and I returned to the task of producing what we expected to be the final 26 episodes of "**Red Velvet and Wild Boronia**" – but the more we explored the archive, the more treasures we uncovered. However by episode 140, we decided it was time to call it a day on that program.

By then Len was keen to get on with producing his own successful series, "**The Broadway Musicals Yearbook**" - and armed with the production skills he had passed on to me during our work on **Red Velvet and Wild Boronia** – I was keen to explore the endless creative possibilities involved in producing the occasional radio special in addition to my weekly broadcasts of "**Dress Circle**".

Ultimately this resulted in a 10 episode series "**In The Foyer**" for the Community Radio Network, CRN, - a four-part series **Sax in the City** in which David Kilby mined the memories of Canberra musician, **Terry Wynn**, and accessed Terry's extensive collection of live recordings of Canberra dance bands, to relive the Canberra dance band scene of the Sixties.

I also produced a series of one- hour specials - **Conversations with Creators** - a radio documentary with **Terry Colhoun** “**Gallipoli – The Odds Were Not Good**” for the ANZAC Centenary, and in 2020, together with **Bart Meehan** co-founded **Artsound Radio Theatre** which Bart has carried on with outstanding success.

Of course I will miss the creative outlet Artsound has provided me — and the company of the many creative and talented people who I get to work with at Artsound — especially **Chris Deacon** — who has rescued me on so many occasions when I managed to stuff up the technicals.

I’ll also miss those projects which will now remain pipedreams on the drawing board, but I will be forever grateful for the opportunities Artsound has provided me to interview and share the experiences of amazing creatives and performers over the years. I estimate that I’ve recorded something in excess of 2,500 interviews during my time at Artsound.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and pay tribute to the unswerving support and encouragement of my wife Pat over my many years with Artsound..who – now - will no longer be able to claim the title of “Artsound Widow”.