

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting – 24 April 2007

President's Report

The past year has been a good one for the Australian National Eisteddfod, with several significant milestones and achievements.

Starting at the end, the ARIA Final was again a great spectacle. The high level of sponsorship from ACTEWAGL and Gavin and Sylvia Tulloch, for which we are extremely grateful, continues to help attract a strong field of contestants, and 2006 had the added attraction of judges from the Operatunity TV series. Kerry Nicholson was the winner, and is planning summer courses in Italy and Austria.

Perhaps the most significant development was the establishment of partnerships with other organizations. Several competitions featured such arrangements, and they proved to be highly successful. Rock Bands sections, introduced for the first time this year, were held at the Canberra Institute of Technology's Music Industry Centre – in addition to providing the venue they contributed a recording prize for the winning Open entrant and media students to film the event and enthuse the on-stage bands by showing it on the big screen! This partnership is continuing into 2007, and we're looking at ways to work more closely with the CIT staff.

In another example of collaboration the National Capital Orchestra (nee Canberra Community Orchestra) offered the winner of a special competition, comprising selected Piano and Instrumental competition winners, the opportunity to be the concerto soloist at a future Orchestra performance. This honour was won by the winner of the Open Piano competition.

Wesley Music Centre was both the venue for, and a partner in, Singing's Oratorio competition and also the venue for the Instrumental competitions. The association will continue with Instrumental competitions being held there this year.

These kinds of partnerships are a major goal of our long-term plan, and it is great to see their development.

Another highlight of 2006 was the inaugural Contemporary Music sections. While entry levels were below those anticipated, the standard of entries was extremely high and it adds a new realm to the Eisteddfod program. My thanks to Dom Harvey from the School of Music who has been a major contributor in seeing this into fruition – as a Sponsor, Convenor and now Artistic Advisor.

The creation of flagship events, as a highlight of each competition, is another long-term aim of the Eisteddfod. The Operatic Aria Final has been the flagship for Singing over many years and we are looking to create similar status for particular events in other competitions. Through the generous support of Dianne Anderson, three Choirs Championship sections have been created this year, and offer major prize money. The Open championship offers \$5,000 for the winner, and \$1,500 for winners of the 12 years and Under and 18 Years and Under championships should provide a major incentive for interstate entrants. It is hoped that Dianne's initiative will inspire others to do likewise. This year also sees the introduction of the British Song section, which is sponsored by the Australia-Britain Society.

We still need to attract major sponsorship to make key sections in other competitions flagship events. This is something that we are working on.

The lead-up to 2007 competitions have not been without their pitfalls – Llewellyn Hall suffered major roof damage in the recent Canberra storms, and will be out of action for most of the year. This has forced the movement of three key events – weekend sections of Bands & Orchestras will now be held at the Canberra Girls Grammar School Hall, and all Choirs competitions and the Aria Final at University House. While we have succeeded in securing alternative venues, the lack of comparable facilities locally was highlighted.

The Ainslie Arts Centre, in which the Eisteddfod office is located, was also hit in a major way by the storm, and will be out of action for some time yet.

We are currently in the final year of our multi-year grant from the ACT Government which helps make Llewellyn Hall accessible to the Eisteddfod, and over the next couple of months will be writing a submission for continued support. In 2007 the Government is also assisting us with project funding for a staff member to help with administration. We are very grateful to the ACT Government and staff at the School of Music and other venues for their ongoing support.

Four of the seven Eisteddfod competitions in 2007 have new convenors. Of those four competitions, three had single convenors in 2006. As a result of the heavy workload on convenors, all competitions now have convening committees to spread the workload among several people. The appointment of an administrator in the office will also provide a further back-up to convenors.

In another development, the Committee approved the appointment of Artistic Advisers to each Competition to facilitate liaison with the artistic community it serves.

While most Competitions broke even last year, the problem of covering ongoing costs remains. Most of our sponsorship goes directly into prizemoney, and the task of covering around \$10,000 in administrative overheads like rent, insurances and communications continues. A sponsorship sub-committee will be established to focus on this; David Needham, who sends his apologies tonight, has submitted a proxy nomination and is ideally placed to lead the team. He has a background in business planning and strategy, product marketing and communications strategies.

Unfortunately our President for 2006-07, Brian White, hasn't experienced good health in the past year, and resigned a month ago. Brian has done a great deal for the Society, initially in the Singing competitions and ARIA and more recently Contemporary Music and from an overall perspective. I thank Brian heartily for all his work, and am sure we all wish him a speedy return to full health.

I'd like to warmly thank everyone who helps make the Eisteddfod possible every year – sponsors in all their various guises and levels, entrants, and everyone who puts in so much time and enthusiasm! This covers a broad range of roles – from convenors to helpers on the day, emcees, stagehands. Also many thanks to Maryanne Kahn and Kaaren Talty for their ongoing graphic design and website work.

Simon Best
President