



## **National Folk Festival**

### **Five Year Report 1993-1997/98**

#### **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. The Board of Directors
3. Overview and History of the Event
4. Vision Statement, Aims and Objectives
5. Summary of Five Year Strategic Plan Results
6. Festival Management
7. Program
8. Volunteers
9. Marketing
10. Attendance
11. Site
12. Services Provided by the Festival
13. Quality of the Event
14. Financial Performance

#### **Appendix**

- A. Income & Expenditure 1998
- B. Attendance Figures 1998
- C. Survey Results 1998

## 1. Introduction

The National Folk Festival was created in 1967 by a group of hard working, dedicated Victorians. Now in its 33rd year, the National is one of Australia's premier folk events, with a strong sense of ownership amongst the folk community across the nation.

In 1992 the future of the National Folk Festival was in doubt. The Australian Folk Trust took a courageous step by taking over the running of the event. This report has been compiled to provide an up to date review of the National Folk Festival and its development over the past six years.

Since 1992 an enormous amount of energy and commitment has been put into firstly, rescuing the Festival, and secondly, building up an organisational framework that will safeguard the Festival's future.

Many tough decisions have been taken. When one considers the desperate situation of the Festival in 1992, the degree of risk that has to be faced in organising such a large and complex event and the major success that the Festival has become, the courage and wisdom of those who made the decisions can be appreciated.

This success is a testament to the tireless efforts of hundreds of people who have worked in numerous voluntary positions for the event. It is also due to a folk community that supported the Festival in a time of need.

The folk community is now seeing the results of that support in having a national event which is strong and healthy and provides a significant service to the people of Australia. It is folk culture that gives us our identity and tells us who we are.

As the Director of the Festival, I have been proud to be a part of the Festival team. I consider that we are the temporary custodians of one of Australia's most important events and it is important that we appreciate the value of what we are doing.

The future of the Festival is assured as long as the organising team continues to listen and respond to the wishes and needs of the Australian community.

## 2. The Board of Directors

Colin McJannett President 1993-97  
Chairman Australian Folk Trust(AFT) 1992-1997  
Member of the board 1993 - present.

Keith McKenry President 1997-present  
Member of the board 1993 - present  
Original AFT Trustee

Seamus Gill Secretary and Public Officer 1997- present  
Member of the board 1993 - present  
Original AFT Trustee

Graham McDonald Secretary and Public Officer 1993-96  
Member of the board 1993 - 1996  
Director AFT 1992-96

Philip Wilson Festival Director and Managing  
Director 1993-present  
Member of the board 1993 - present

Jeanne Tahini Member of the board 1996-97  
AFT Office Manager 1992-96  
Co-ordinator Media, Indigenous  
Performers and Finales 1993- 1996

Poppy Wenham Vice President 1997-present  
Member of the board 1996-present  
Co-ordinator Stage Management 1993 & 94  
Co-ordinator Festival Office 1995

Graham Cruttenden Treasurer 1997-98  
Member of the board 1997-present  
Co-ordinator Festival Treasury  
1994 - present

Julie Hodges Member of the board 1997-98  
Co-ordinator Ticket Office 1995 & 96  
Volunteer Management Team 1997 & 98

John Taylor Member of the board 1998-present  
Co-ordinator Festival Security 1997 & 98

Cassidy Buxton Member of the board 1998-present  
Co-ordinator Ticket Office 1997 & 98

### **3. Overview and History of the Event**

The National Folk Festival is Australia's premier festival of traditional and contemporary folk culture. Widely recognised as a national event, it attracts visitors from across Australia and across the world.

The Festival presents music, song, dance, spoken word and street theatre over four days and five nights at Easter each year. Held at Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC), the Festival recreates a village atmosphere with food and craft stalls, instrument makers and street performers. The 1998 program presented over 1,000 performers from Australia and around the world in 207 acts with 724 hours of performance: 117 concerts; 14 social dances and balls; 40 dance displays; 99 workshops in singing, playing instruments and dance; 59 children's activities; and numerous unprogrammed concerts, sessions and street shows. An Easter School was conducted over the two days before the Festival, giving people an opportunity to receive personal tuition from highly respected artists.

Each year the National Folk Festival has a "Featured State" promoting performers from that State. Additional performers come from all around Australia. Also the Festival is pleased to bring a few performers from other parts of the world. The Festival is presented for all Australians and appeals to a wide cross-section of people, many of whom have had little previous experience of the diversity of material presented.

The National Folk Festival has been presented annually since its inception as the Port Phillip Folk Festival in Melbourne in 1967. Until 1992 it was organised by the State Folk Federations on behalf of the Australian Folk Trust (AFT) on a rotating basis in the various major cities throughout Australia.

The Festival was highly successful in terms of attendance and community support. Nevertheless, heavy financial losses were sustained by organising groups between 1988 and 1992.

In 1992 the AFT decided that the size and scope of the event had grown such that the Festival needed a permanent home and a professional management team. Several cities were considered and, eventually, Canberra was chosen. AFT chairperson Dale Dengate played a significant role in reaching this difficult decision. In 1993 the Festival established a company to operate the event, employed a full-time Director and established an office in Gorman House, Braddon.

#### 4. Vision Statement, Aims and Objectives

##### Vision

An annual celebration of folk life showcasing the quality of Australia's cultural diversity and creativity in a fun-filled and community atmosphere.

##### Objectives

Recognising that folk arts are living culture, vibrant components of contemporary Australian life and play an important role in:

- enhancing national and community identity;
- fostering community bonding and understanding;
- providing an accessible means of self-expression; and
- transmission of community values

the objectives of the National Folk Festival are:

- To present, promote and nurture all aspects of both traditional and contemporary folk arts and culture in Australia. The Festival should present the traditional origins of the many cultures that make up our population and the contemporary expression of these cultures.
- To promote an atmosphere of increased understanding between people of all cultural backgrounds.
- To improve community awareness of the cultural and social diversity of Australia, its history and its contemporary culture, social issues and concerns. The Festival aims to present a holistic view of cultures including traditions, belief systems, life skills, myths and legends as well as the song, music and dance of each cultural background.
- To present a colourful, dynamic and quality program of concerts, workshops and other activities attractive both to folk arts enthusiasts and to the general community.
- To ensure a wide range of participation which allows for the opportunity of representation by all states and territories, ages, sexes, cultures, political, social and spiritual groups.
- To stimulate and encourage community participation, wherever possible in all aspects of the Festival, including through dance, instrument, craft and singing workshops and the spoken word.
- To encourage originality, creativity, and innovation in song writing, music, poetry, dance, comedy, stories and street entertainment, craft, workshops and performance.
- To manage resources (monetary, volunteers, performers, participants) efficiently and effectively in order to maximise the enjoyment, quality of service, professionalism and profitability of the Festival for everyone involved.
- To present to as wide an audience as possible.
- To attract people under the age of 25.
- To provide top-class entertainment and fun.
- To create a self-sustaining, well-supported event.
- To encourage the recording and preservation of traditional folk arts and culture.
- To attract a range of quality and innovative food and craft stalls to participate on a regular basis.
- To provide opportunities for folk arts enthusiasts to meet informally and to share common interests.

- To maintain and nurture the goodwill of the volunteers and supporters who make the Festival work.
- To foster the Festival as the premier folk arts event in Australia, linking with State and regional folk festivals.

## **5. Five Year Strategic Plan Results**

In 1992 it was clear that the future of the Festival depended on the ability of the organising team to address a number of key issues. In addition there was perceived to be a need to develop policies which would allow the Festival to achieve the objectives set out in the Vision Statement.

A five year strategic plan was drawn up which identified a series of goals which could provide purpose and direction for the event. These goals and the level of achievement gained are indicated in the following statistics:

NOTE: 1997 was the end of the five year plan.

### **GOAL 1**

To be accepted as the national folk event with strong attendance from around the country. In 1998, 69% of patrons were visitors from interstate or overseas. Overall interstate and overseas visitation has increased steadily each year. Table 1 shows the percentage of overall visitors for each State.

### **GOAL 2**

To achieve a high level of self-sufficiency. In 1998, 77% of income was Festival generated, from ticket sales, camping fees, stall fees, bar sales, shop sales and program sales.

### **GOAL 3**

To achieve 30% growth in attendance per annum (1993-1997). An average growth of 36.5% p.a. was achieved: from 8,000 (1992) to 38,000 (1997). Targets for growth in attendance have since been revised to 20% per annum. Growth in attendance was 21% in 1997 and 11% in 1998.

### **GOAL 4**

To develop an established loyal base of support. In 1998, 56% of visitors had attended the Festival the previous year; 73% said they would come the following year and 25% said they might do so.

### **GOAL 5**

To develop healthy participation and attendance by young people, thereby stimulating the creation of a new generation of people involved in folk culture. In 1998 the proportion of visitors less than 30 years old was 35% and less than 20 years old was 23%.

### **GOAL 6**

To attract a strong sponsorship base for the event. In 1998 the Festival was sponsored by the Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation; Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; Guinness Australia; Prime Television; Radio 2CC and Ridges Canberra..

### **GOAL 7**

To develop a strong sense of shared ownership in the event. This has been achieved in two main ways: through the strength of the volunteer team, which has grown from 200 (1993) to 700 (1998), and through the Featured State strategy.

### **GOAL 8**

To develop a strong volunteer team. The volunteer team in 1998 numbered 700, with 400 of these each working a rostered 16 hours (or more) for the Festival. A strong team of volunteers

staffed the office throughout the year. The volunteer survey carried out in 1997 revealed that the Festival retained 50% of volunteers from previous years. Of those who had previously participated, 77% had volunteered in 1996. Volunteers were either very satisfied or satisfied (96%) with their volunteering experience; 92% said they would like to volunteer in 1998. The Festival has a strong team of 30 - 40 volunteer co-ordinators who manage volunteers in different areas of the event, such as bar, child-care, garbage, stage management and ticket office.

#### **GOAL 9**

To incorporate a strong educational element to the Festival. The Easter School was established in 1996 with an attendance of about 120. The 1998 Festival program included 126 workshops teaching dancing, singing and instrument playing.

#### **GOAL 10**

To keep the Festival accessible by keeping ticket prices down. Ticket prices in 1998 were:

Adult Season Ticket \$85

Adult Day Ticket (9 am to midnight) \$25

These prices are generally below those of other major folk festivals in Australia and compare very well with theatre, cinema tickets or events such as the WOMAdelaide festival (\$49 per day). The cost of a season ticket for a similar event in the United Kingdom would be in the order of A\$250.

#### **GOAL 11**

To pre-sell as many tickets as possible before the event to allow for the risk of bad weather and resultant possible low day attendance. In 1998, 52% of ticket income was pre-sold.

#### **GOAL 12**

To be a truly multicultural event by presenting a comprehensive view of folk culture including traditions, belief systems, folklore, crafts, food etc. in addition to the music, song, dance and spoken word of the many cultures that make up our population.

The 1998 Festival program presented works from over 30 cultures. There were over 1,000 performers in 255 acts with 740 hours of performance. These included: 142 concerts; 14 social dances and balls; 40 dance displays; 126 workshops in singing, playing instruments and dance; 59 children's activities; and numerous unprogrammed concerts, sessions and street shows. Some of the cultures represented were Aboriginal, African, Australian, Breton, Bulgarian, Canadian, Caribbean, Celtic, Central American, Chinese, Dutch, Ecuadorian, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Indian, Irish, Israeli, Italian, Macedonian, Middle Eastern, North American, Pacific Islander, Russian, Scottish, South American, Slovenian, Spanish, Tibetan, Torres Strait Islander and Welsh.

#### **GOAL 13**

To establish the Festival as an environmentally responsible event. In 1998, the Festival extended its commitment to waste minimisation, asking all food-stall holders to minimise their use of plastics. All food is now served in paper containers or washable plates. Styrofoam cups have largely been eliminated by the provision of a Festival washing-up service. Stalls and venues have collection points for washable cups and plates. The Festival recycles all plastics, glass, paper, cardboard and aluminium cans throughout the site.

#### **GOAL 14**

To encourage the recording and preservation of traditional folk arts and culture. The National Folk Festival works with the National Library of Australia to record much of the material presented at the Festival for archive purposes, to provide a permanent record and to help preserve our culture. In addition, the Festival assists collectors of folk heritage to prepare and present their work at the Festival.

## 6. Festival Management

In 1992 the Australian Folk Trust requested legal advice on how to set up an organisational structure which would safeguard the Trust and individual Trustees from risk but allow for the long-term running of an event with an operating turnover that in time would grow to over a million dollars per year.

The advice received was to form a non-profit limited liability company. Such a company would require that Directors are accountable to the National Securities Commission, with strict audit and professional conduct requirements and with personal liability in the event of mismanagement.

The National Folk Festival Ltd was formed in 1993 with a Board comprising five Trustees from the AFT, the then Director of the AFT and the newly appointed Festival Director.

In 1998 the Festival has a Board of eight Directors including three of the original AFT Trustees, the Festival Director (the Managing Director of the company) and four Directors appointed from the volunteer organising team.

A requirement for appointment to the Board is to have made a demonstrated commitment and contribution to the Festival over a number of years. The company is managed by its members who are current and ex-Directors of the company.

In 1997 the board introduced a mechanism which allows for the replacement of two members of the board each year. The board considers it important that fresh ideas and energy are regularly introduced to the board while the long term integrity and stability of the Festival are protected.

The Board meets on a monthly basis and takes an overseeing role, leaving the operational decision-making to the organising team under the supervision of the Managing Director.

The Festival has three full-time employees: the Managing Director, the Operations Manager and the Support Manager. A team of between 30 and 40 co-ordinators manage the many operational areas of the Festival under the direction of the three full-time employees. Each co-ordinator supervises teams of volunteers of varying size.

## 7. Program

The National Folk Festival is a significant national cultural event in that it exists for the purpose of people joining together to showcase Australia's rich diverse culture. The Festival is Australia's premier folk event presenting our traditional and contemporary peoples' cultures. Every year it seeks to restate who we are in terms of our culture, not only through music, song, dance and spoken word, but also our traditions, belief systems and social values.

The Festival program is created by the Festival Managing Director in consultation with a team of consultants and co-ordinators who provide specialist advice regarding program content within their areas of expertise.

Specialist areas include the dancing and dance display programs, singer-songwriters, spoken word, children's content, street performance and traditional Australian, English, Irish and American music. Wide consultation among respected people in the featured state provides input into how the state will be represented. These processes are being further developed each year.

Balance of content is carefully considered from a number of points of view: male and female representation; traditional and contemporary representation; ethnicity of material; representation from all States, etc.

The program is constructed in line with a number of basic philosophies:

- excellence in performance;
- nurturing of young performers;
- priority to Australian performers;

- a strong participation and education focus; and
- it incorporates a featured State concept.

### **Programming process**

Each year, expressions of interest in participating at the Festival are requested to be lodged by 31 August. From the 600 or more applications received, about 220 are selected by the Festival Director in consultation with Festival co-ordinators.

The Festival pro-actively seeks out unusual or specialist performers who will provide interest and balance in the program. Many such performers may be too modest to apply or may be outside normal communication channels.

The programming team visits the next year's featured State to gain first hand knowledge. This focused attention enables the Festival to discover some hitherto little known performers of special interest.

Overseas performers are carefully selected from the many wishing to tour Australia in autumn. The Festival policy that Australian performers will not be disadvantaged by the booking of overseas acts is implemented firmly: by selecting those who already are part of a tour, high costs can be avoided. Overseas performers are selected only if they have an established reputation, will be able to inspire people or are coming to Australia under grant assistance.

Performer selections are usually completed by November, then the program timetable is constructed before the Christmas break to allow time to verify performance times before publicity material is prepared in January.

The Festival works closely with the Australian Performing Rights Association (APRA) and supports APRA's role in protecting the rights of composers. We believe that we also have a responsibility to protect performers' rights to play traditional material without copyright restrictions.

The 1998 Festival represented over 30 cultures including:

- Aboriginal, African, Australian, Breton, Bulgarian, Canadian, Caribbean, Celtic, Central American, Chinese, Dutch, Ecuadorian, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Indian, Irish, Israeli, Italian, Macedonian, Middle Eastern, North American, Pacific Islander, Russian, Scottish, South American, Slovenian, Spanish, Tibetan, Torres Strait Islander and Welsh.

These were presented through:

- 142 concerts; 14 social dances and balls; 40 dance displays; 126 workshops in singing, playing instruments and dance; 59 children's activities; and numerous unprogrammed concerts, sessions and street shows;
- over 1,000 performers; and
- over 740 hours of performance.

Australia's indigenous culture is integrated into the National Folk Festival through traditional dance, costume, spoken word and music. The Festival's presentation of indigenous cultures contributes to increased awareness and understanding of these cultures.

The National Folk Festival is specifically dedicated to the preservation, promotion and presentation of the many diverse cultures which make up Australia's population. The National Folk Festival:

- has a continuing relationship with the National Library of Australia which records, for archive purposes, much of the material presented at the Festival, providing a permanent record and helping to preserve our culture;
- provides the opportunity for collectors of Australian culture to present their work to the public;



- brings together instrument makers from various parts of Australia to present their work and share their skills;
- seeks out precious items of cultural significance to be presented at the Festival and to be recorded; and
- has developed relationships with local and national broadcasters to take our culture to a wider audience who may not visit the Festival.

The National Folk Festival is one of our nation's most significant cultural events. The Festival contributes enormously to the cultural life of our nation, providing a very accessible form of culture with which ordinary people can identify. The Festival is regarded as the nation's premier event of its type, receiving direct input in setting objectives, program, and format from folk federations, ethnic groups and folk clubs from all States of Australia.

The Festival is committed to continually developing and improving the quality of the content and structure of its program. The Festival seeks and books high quality performers every year and ensures that the program represents a broad range of cultural backgrounds. New concerts and ideas are introduced each year. In 1997, the spoken word program and the children's festival were upgraded.

All performer submissions are assessed by the Festival Director and the Program Co-ordinator. Many submissions are passed on to consultants who provide recommendations and advice. This process develops further each year. Each year a number of people in the featured State are consulted regarding performers and programmed events for to feature the State: Paths (Preservation of Australian Traditional Heritage Society) advised and organised traditional Australian material; a youth panel provided a young person's perspective and assessed relevant offerings; and a number of selected experts were consulted and provided assessments on dance, dance display, spoken word, children's activities, and specialist areas such as American music and acappella. Final decisions rest with the Festival Director who carries the responsibility of achieving balance, depth and quality within the program.

### **Programing Philosophy**

The Festival program is very complex in terms of the number of venues, the number of performers and the range and type of material being presented. In order to provide a framework in which to construct the program a series of fundamental guidelines are incorporated as follows.

We seek to present a representative range of cultural backgrounds. For many years the National had a heavy emphasis on Anglo Celtic program content. This has been added to over the past six years including indigenous and other ethnic backgrounds as the program has grown. An inclusive approach has been adopted which welcomes all cultural backgrounds with careful and sensitive integration in the program.

Folk culture is the culture of the people and provides a sense of identity of who we are both in the past and the present and also the sort of future we would like for our children. A careful balance is needed of traditional material which states our cultural origins and contemporary material which expresses who we are now and where our future is heading. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain satisfactory levels of well presented traditional content and we are now seeing a new generation of young singer songwriters who have had little contact with traditional material. This is unfortunate and it is interesting to note that traditional material, which has stood the test of time, in general goes down with audiences better than much of the contemporary content.

The Festival has a stated aim of giving preference to Australian performers. Each year only a selected few of the many touring overseas artists are included in the National program. To be selected overseas artists need to be either a well known act that many people would want to see or they need to be inspirational in some way that will make a significant contribution to the Australian folk community. Overseas acts must also be available at a cost which does not disadvantage Australian performers.

The National has a stated role of education, the aim being to increase the awareness of and

participation in our folk culture.

Financial constraints have made it necessary to introduce a philosophy of participation through much of the Festival program with the concert program being supported by a whole range of events where people come and share their interests and expertise with others. This approach has been a major factor in shaping the National and giving it the unique identity it has today. It is a place where the distinction between performers and audience is blurred and where performers come to interact with their peers.

Audience development has been a major priority over the past six years and to achieve this it has been necessary to ensure that the program provides a comprehensive range of material. To develop new audiences it is necessary to attract people and progressively develop their interests and knowledge. This requires the inclusion of threshold or introductory program content as well as more specialist material.

The content balance is continually monitored with concert, dance, workshop and session components being balanced. Where shortfalls are identified the Festival strives to redress the balance. In recent years we have been working to stimulate interest in the spoken word and traditional Australian content. More recently a decline in traditional social dance has been noted and the Festival is seeking ways of addressing this.

The Festival is committed to gender balance in the program. This is very difficult at times but is an aim that is continually monitored.

In 1992 it was clear that if the Folk community was to thrive then a new generation of people had to be attracted into the folk scene. This has happened and we are now seeing many young people coming into the National both as performers and audience. In programming we particularly seek out young performers.

### **Program Format**

The format of the program has also changed over the years. For many years the National program was compiled in a tried and tested format. In 1989 the Maleny Festival introduced some radical new concepts and over the years these have been further developed and refined. One of the major benefits of having the National established in Canberra with a pool of established expertise is that new ideas can be progressively tried and developed.

There has been a move to continuous programming and staggered event starts which allow more effective use of venues, the opportunity for people to "window shop" before deciding which event they will stay at and allows a spread of workload on food outlets.

Many Festival are continually trying new presentation formats such as round robin concerts and performer interviews. Avoiding clashes in the program, selecting performers, choosing appropriate venues and setting performance durations provide continuing challenges for Festival programming.

The National has established number of traditional events which will not change each year (such as the World Poetry Debate and the Colonial Ball) while continually introducing new ideas to keep the Festival fresh and interesting.

## **8. Volunteers**

In order to ensure that the Festival is successful, it is essential that the Festival's volunteer program is well managed and geared towards building and maintaining a skilled and motivated volunteer team.

The National Folk Festival prides itself on being an event which is almost entirely run by the Canberra community. The volunteer program is a community organisation in itself. The Festival relies on over 700 volunteers, each of whom works from four to several hundred hours before, during or after the event. With the exception of the Festival Director all board members are volunteers. Without these volunteers, the Festival would not be possible.

The volunteer team has grown steadily since 1992, when the present organisation inherited an event that was already large in scale but without a cohesive volunteer team. The early years were difficult, requiring a concerted effort to develop the team to the necessary strength to efficiently run the event. By 1997, when the expertise and co-operation of the team had reached a new height, morale and satisfaction in the group noticeably improved.

The key to this achievement was the establishment in 1995 of a volunteer management team whose role was to recruit, train and serve the volunteers. Each year the volunteer management team progressively improves its expertise and operation: this is reflected in the continuing development of the strength of the volunteer team.

In 1997, a comprehensive survey was conducted to understand volunteers' motivations, expectations and experiences of the Festival. The results have assisted volunteer co-ordinators to develop a more structured and formalised volunteer program that includes good job design; well planned recruitment; formal screening processes and selection; more specific training; improved communication channels; good supervision of volunteers; improved volunteer recognition and rewards; and on-going volunteer evaluation.

The Festival works closely with the Volunteer Centre of the ACT, which provides information about volunteering and runs training sessions for our volunteers. The Festival's ability to identify the personal motivational factors of volunteers and satisfy these requirements has improved in recent years. For example, a number of volunteers seek to gain skills or experience which may help them to find employment or move into more meaningful work. Over the years many volunteers have been able to achieve personal goals through their involvement with the Festival.

Volunteers gain many benefits from their involvement with the Festival, including a sense of ownership of the event, increased skills, greater employment opportunities, social interaction, a sense of belonging within the team, a ticket to the Festival if they work a certain number of hours, and more. There is a high retention rate of volunteers, and there are always more people volunteering their time to the Festival as it grows and demands additional human resources.

The volunteer program trains and supervises people in many aspects of event management: stage management, shop and ticket sales, performer support and MC-ing. Volunteers work within defined areas of responsibility with co-ordinators for each area. These include bar operation, bar setup, camping and parking, childcare, Festival office, garbage, performer payments, performer transport, program, recycling, security, shop, site construction, site cleanup, stage management, stalls, surveys, ticket office, and treasury.

## **9. Marketing**

The National Folk Festival is a unique event which has been proven to benefit from an unusual but appropriate approach to marketing that has increased visitor numbers steadily each year. Marketing strategies for the National Folk Festival have been developed over the past six years in consultation with organisers of a number of other major Australian events.

### **Target Markets**

The target audience for the National Folk Festival is very broad: all ages, all cultural backgrounds, all socioeconomic groups. The Festival is a mainstream event. Growth in attendance during the past three years has been among people with no previous interest in or awareness of the folk arts. Extensive research indicates that the Festival appeals to a broader base of the population than more specialist "niche market" events.

Marketing strategies are designed to address four market sectors as follows:

- Canberra residents;
- temporary visitors to Canberra during Easter;
- interstate residents; and

- overseas residents.

The Festival also aims to attract a greater number of young people to the event, so specific marketing strategies have been targeted at this group.

### **Marketing Strategies**

Developing and supporting a word of mouth campaign is the general strategy for the Festival. The approach is to seek out and establish an attendance from a particular group and then to support a word of mouth campaign to develop that attendance. Promotion is designed to trigger and support the personal campaign. This strategy has been well proven, is highly cost effective and creates a strong sense of loyalty in the audience.

Results from the 1998 survey indicate that 34% of visitors heard about the Festival through word of mouth and 26% through knowledge of the Festival as a regular event. The Festival's philosophy is that, by ensuring a high quality experience, every person who comes to the event becomes a member of its sales team.

The Festival has experienced significant growth in attendance numbers over the past five years. The unique atmosphere and sense of community of the Festival is very fragile, so a careful balance must be maintained. New people coming into the Festival must be assimilated at a rate slow enough that they can pick up the sense of community and become part of it. If too great an influx of people were to join the Festival at once, they may swamp the prevailing social culture and the sense of community may be lost.

To date, this careful balancing act has been successful. The marketing strategy of stimulating and supporting a word of mouth campaign has been very beneficial in that it has resulted in new people coming who have been friends of those who regularly attend and therefore are more likely to be easily assimilated.

We believe audience growth in future years must be no more than 20 per cent per year to preserve the integrity of the event and to allow the infrastructure to cope with increased numbers each year. We avoid using the strategy of booking non-folk performers to attract new audiences.

## **10. Attendance**

Attendance at the Festival has increased steadily as follows:

1993	15,000
1994	19,100
1995	24,000
1996	31,600
1997	38,000
1998	42,000

The Festival has developed a loyal audience. 56% of visitors at the 1998 Festival were repeat visitors from 1997 and a further 29% had been in earlier years.

### **Younger Audience**

Marketing and programming strategies have successfully developed a healthy interest among young people. Survey results indicate a significant increase in the proportion of young people attending the Festival. Visitors under the age of 30 made up 35% of total attendances in 1998.

It is pleasing to see that there is a significant increase in the number of young performers coming into the folk community. The stimulation of a new generation was identified in 1992 as important requirement for the continued health and vibrancy of folk arts in Australia.

### **Interstate and Overseas Attendance**

Since the National Folk Festival has been fixed in Canberra, the team has worked hard to ensure that the Festival be perceived as a national event rather than merely a Canberra event.

Much hard work has been done to ensure that the event is inclusive, involving as many people around the country as possible. The introduction of the Featured State concept has greatly assisted this effort. Great care is similarly taken to include wide representation in the Festival program.

The success of this work has been indicated in the increasing proportion of interstate visitors to the event. In 1993, 58% of Festival visitors came from outside the ACT. In 1998 this proportion had increased to 69%.

Where people came from in 1998:

ACT	31%
NSW	41%
VIC	21%
QLD	3%
SA	2%
TAS	0.8%
WA	0.3%
NT	0.1%
NZ	0.2%
Other	0.6%

### **The Size of the Event - A Major Issue**

There has been much discussion regarding the size of the National Folk Festival and a number of issues have been identified for consider.

Analysis of the National Folk Festival in 1992 indicated that the budget for the event was out of balance. An event of the size and complexity of the National required an established office and a full time staff. As the nation's premier Folk Festival the National required a budget sufficiently large to allow it to satisfy this role. It needed to be able to afford to bring leading performers from anywhere in Australia and present them in high quality concerts.

The five year plan provided for increasing the size of the event in line with achieve these goals.

In the growth that has followed every effort has been made to retain the character of the event. Surveys indicate that people consider that the atmosphere is the most important factor of the Festival and the board has determined that the atmosphere must be retained.

Some people would like to see the National as a small informal festival while others consider it the national showcase event which takes folk to the wider community and therefore should be a large event.

The quality of the event, however, has resulted in ever-increasing numbers of people wishing to attend. Plans to restrict numbers without unduly affecting the event is a delicate matter and actions such as limiting the number of tickets or increasing prices, are likely to create there own problems.

For the time being the Board has decided to allow the Festival to continue growing while closely monitoring it to ensure that the atmosphere is preserved.

## 11. The Site

The Festival is held at Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC), one of the best venues in Australia for this type of event. The attractive site provides a number of useful, comfortable buildings in a compact area.

The two largest buildings are the Budawang, used during federal elections as the National Tally Room, and the Currong, a basketball stadium which has a huge sprung parquet floor and can accommodate 2,000 people.

The site has landscaped areas which provide relaxing outdoor venues. Facilities include ample power and water throughout the site.

EPIC provides excellent camping facilities immediately adjacent to the area used for the Festival, with a number of ablution blocks.

Parking for day visitors is available immediately across the road from the site's front entrance. This large paddock is well able to cope with the volume of visitors' cars.

Disabled persons' access to all areas of the site is available, with disabled parking places immediately adjacent to a site access gate on level ground.

The Festival has 15 venues, including seven concert venues ranging in size from a 1,500 seat main stage to an intimate 150 seat room; two dance halls; an outdoor piazza; three workshop rooms; two children's venues; and plenty of space for numerous informal performances and activities.

## 12. Services

The National Folk Festival aims to satisfy every visitor's needs by providing a broad range of services outside those normally expected. They include:

**Childcare.** Childcare is available at the low cost of \$2.50 per hour per child, from noon to midnight each day. Qualified child carers supervise the children.

**The Festival Shop.** Many of the performers at the Festival have CDs and cassettes for sale. The Festival shop stocks these as well as a range of books and instruments. The shop also has EFTPOS facilities. Performers are charged 15% of CD prices as a handling charge. Performers are permitted also to sell directly in the venues after their performances at no charge.

**Lost Children and Property.** The Festival Office runs a lost and found service for both lost property and children.

**Health Services.** St. John's Ambulance has trained first-aid volunteers on site. Qualified nursing staff are on call 24 hours a day during the event.

**Instrument Lockup.** The Festival provides instrument lockup facilities where performers and visitors can leave their instruments, costumes and equipment.

**Volunteer Kitchen and Massage Service.** A volunteer kitchen, rest area and massage service are provided for Festival volunteers.

**Children's Festival.** A full Children's Festival program is run in a designated area within the site. The children's program was enhanced in 1997 to include a stream of activities to support the established concert stream, including instrument workshops. This included concerts, circus activities, puppets, storytelling, singing, instrument making and playing, and multicultural song and dance. The Festival prides itself on providing a safe and stimulating environment for children. This allows their parents to enjoy other parts of the Festival with peace of mind, knowing that their

children are safe and enjoying themselves too. Many parents comment that they are very pleased to feel that their children are in a safe, secure environment.

**Information.** The Festival Program booklet provides visitors with useful information, such as where to find the nearest medical centre, chemist, hospital, ATM, supermarket, petrol station or laundry. The Program booklet also provides visitors with information regarding child care, recycling, the Festival shop, lost children and property, health services, transport, food and drink, licensed bars, location of the Festival site office, where to find help and a calendar of folk-related events in Australia. Volunteers provide visitors with assistance around the site.

**Easter Celebration Church Service.** The Festival runs a nondenominational service on Easter Sunday for all visitors to attend.

**Folk Alliance Australia [FAA] Meeting.** The FAA is a national organisation committed to providing assistance, support and representation to everyone interested in folk culture. The Festival provides support for the FAA, in a number of ways including the provision of a venue and program time during the Festival.

**The National Folk Festival Forum.** The Festival runs a forum each year where visitors can air their thoughts about the future direction of the Festival.

**Smoke-Free.** The National Folk Festival has a smoke-free policy that applies to all venues.

**Telephones.** There are three public telephones on site at EPIC for the use of visitors.

**Toilet and Shower Facilities.** There are seven toilet blocks for visitors on site, plus two on the camping site. There are also two shower blocks on site, with another five in the camping areas.

**Food to Cater for All Needs.** Food outlets at the Festival are carefully selected to ensure that plenty of healthy food is available at reasonable prices. There is a broad range of food to choose from, including vegetarian cuisine.

**Camping Facilities.** For those visitors who wish to stay on site, there is a camping ground on the EPIC site, adjacent to the Festival program area. A breakfast kitchen is provided in the camping areas.

**People with Disabilities.** Exhibition Park in Canberra is fully equipped to cater for visitors with disabilities with wheelchair access to all areas. The Festival provides disabled parking immediately next to the site access gate. Venues are positioned close to each other, which allows minimum travelling time between them.

### **13. Event Quality**

The future of the National Folk Festival will be determined by the quality of the event. As the National Showcase folk event, it takes our folk culture out to a wider audience. It is best able to serve the interests of the folk community if it ensures quality in the showcase it presents. Quality also sets standards which inspire and motivate folk performers across the country.

The National Folk Festival is committed to excellence both in the performances it presents and in the experience and service that it provides to visitors. The Festival team regards as imperative the need to ensure that visitors' requirements are adequately met so that visitors are more than satisfied with the service they receive.

#### **Feedback - A Key Success Factor**

The success of a service organisation is dependant on its ability to listen and respond to public opinion. The Festival is committed to a process of continuous assessment and improvement to ensure that it meets the expectations of people across the country.

#### **Performance Review Processes**

The Festival has set up a number of performance review processes:

- future direction is determined after wide consultation with all stakeholders including the State Folk Federations, ethnic groups, folk clubs and societies, dance organisations, performers, collectors, specialists, sponsors, grant funding bodies and other festivals;
- volunteer co-ordinators and volunteers complete operational reports and hold comprehensive debriefing meetings after each event to review performance;
- a large number of personal feedback letters are received and continually referred to during the planning process;
- random audience surveys are carried out during the Festival;
- event reports are collected from venue and technical crews; and
- surveys of performers, volunteers and stall holders are conducted.

These performance review processes have allowed the Festival to identify problems and issues, readily eliminate them and continually improve the Festival. Feedback also indicates which aspects of the Festival are successful so that the organisers know what works and what does not. This significantly contributes to the quality of the Festival, thereby increasing satisfaction and attendance. Examples of areas of improvement are:

- In 1997 the Festival introduced a computerised ticketing system. The database system allows staff to update mailing lists while processing ticket sales.
- The National Folk Festival is continually upgrading the arrangement of venues at EPIC. In 1997 the Piazza, an outdoor performance area, was improved by the introduction of a new dance floor and increased seating capacity.

Management of the venues of performances and workshops is a very important factor in ensuring quality of customer service. The Festival has taken measures to provide appropriate capacity in venues, quality sound and equipment and small walking distance between venues. The Festival also endeavours to start and finish performances on time, and generally manages to do so.

#### 14. Financial Management

Sound financial management of the National Folk Festival has been probably the most important factor in the Festival's success over the past six years. The change to the structure of a non-profit limited liability company and the employment of a professional management team has ensured the Festival has the expertise to closely manage its finances.

From 1993 to 1998 the Festival has been in a developmental stage and there has had to be a careful balance between the need to invest in the event and the generation of revenue to cover costs. Strategic long term planning was required to address the revenue losses that would be incurred in the event of the ever present risk of bad weather significantly impacting upon attendance. The approach between 1993 and 1998 has been to produce economies of scale through increased attendance and success has been produced by creating steady audience growth while carefully managing increases in expenditure.

The Festival is managed as a non-profit event with any surplus being reinvested into developing the event. Each year since 1993, the Festival has achieved a surplus of around \$30,000 that has been reinvested in the event. In 1992 the Festival had an operating budget of around \$180,000. By 1998 this gross turnover figure had increased to nearly \$700,000.

Year	Operating Revenue	Surplus
1992/3	\$258,432	\$30,188
1993/4	\$343,755	\$35,637
1994/5	\$406,670	\$39,096
1995/6	\$451,724	\$49,646*



1996/7	\$551,161	\$8,954*
1997/8	\$677,693	\$40,066

\* \$20,000 of income for 1996/97 was received before the end of the financial year and so appears in the 1995/96 figures.

In June 1998 the Festival had nearly \$40,000 invested in a vehicle, equipment and computer systems, sufficient funds to operate its office until the next Festival and a self-insurance fund of \$50,000.

Organising the National involves considerable financial risk and insurance against such unpredictable factors as the weather is very expensive. To protect the National and ensure its long term survival it is essential that an operating reserve is built up to self insure the event. The reserve needs to be appropriate for an operating turnover that will reach a million dollars within the next three to four years.

Each year the National Folk Festival invests increased financial resources into the Festival's infrastructure. It is anticipated that, within the next three years, infrastructure costs will stabilise while income continues to increase. At this stage the Festival will be self sufficient with an income that will properly cover the true cost of running the event.

The Festival is able to generate nearly 85%\* of its income from the event, with a further 5% from sponsors and 10% from government grants. (\*In 1998 this figure was reduced to 77% the government assistance being boosted by substantial grants for the Peoples Forest Project). These proportions are in stark contrast to the vast majority of Festivals around the country which depend in large part on substantial government funding.

For graphs of proportional distribution of Income and expenditure see the Appendix.

### **Ticket Pricing**

The National has a policy of keeping ticket prices as low as possible while providing a high quality experience. A careful balance needs to be struck between these two requirements.

Surveys indicate that the vast majority of people consider the event to be very good value for money particularly when compared with other types of entertainment such as concerts or films.

A close eye is kept on other festivals and events to ensure that the National keeps prices in line with or lower than other comparable events and maintains its 'good value for money' reputation. It is interesting to note that in the UK a similar event costs in the order of \$250 for a season ticket compared with \$85 for the '98 National.

### **Grants and Sponsorship**

The Festival continually seeks grants and sponsorship to support the event.

Applications are made for a range of projects to both State and Commonwealth Government agencies and the Festival has developed strategic partnerships with a number of organisations.

The ACT Government has provided continuing assistance since 1993, which has been an important factor in the survival of the event. Since 1997 the Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation has become a major partner providing substantial assistance to the event.

The CFMEU, a major supporter, has been proud of its association with a major event which promotes strong social values and sense of community.

The Festival has worked steadily with Guinness Australia to generate a substantial increase in market penetration of Guinness in the ACT region.

The Festival strongly supports healthy eating and lifestyle and has worked with Healthpact to promote healthy heart and diabetes awareness.

The Festival promotes awareness of indigenous culture and receives support from ATSIC.

In recent years the Festival has worked in partnership with the National Library of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive to present collaborative projects.

Funding in recent years also has been provided by artsACT, Australia Foundation, Visions Australia, the Canberra Times, Tourism Tasmania, Arts WA, Rydges, Radio 2CC, Prime Television and EPIC.

The Festival has not attracted the level of sponsorship income that once was hoped for. Sponsorship is difficult to secure in a very competitive environment where sports are favoured over cultural events.

## Appendix

### 1998 Income

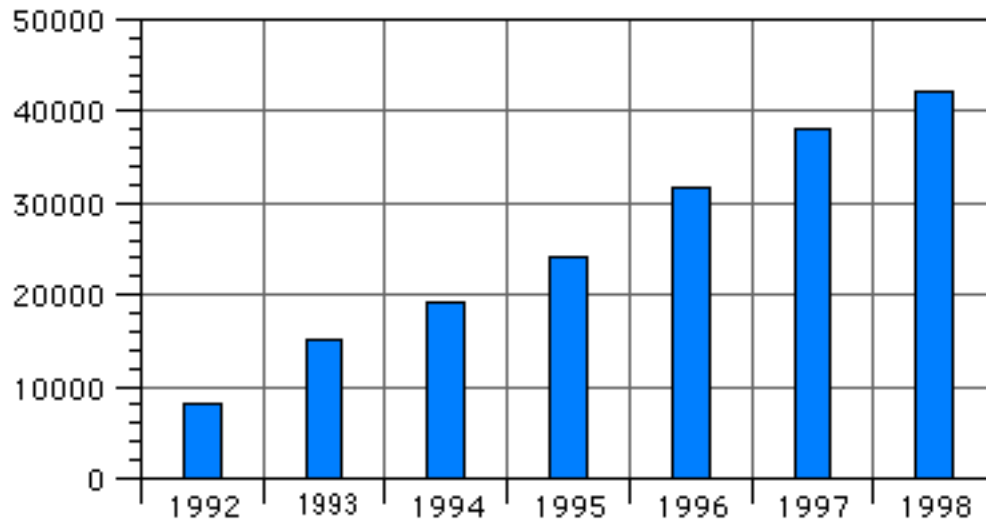
- 67% Ticket Sales
- 10% Concessions, Bars and Shop Sales
- 9% Commonwealth Grants
- 8% ACT Grants
- 6% Sponsors

### 1998 Expenditure

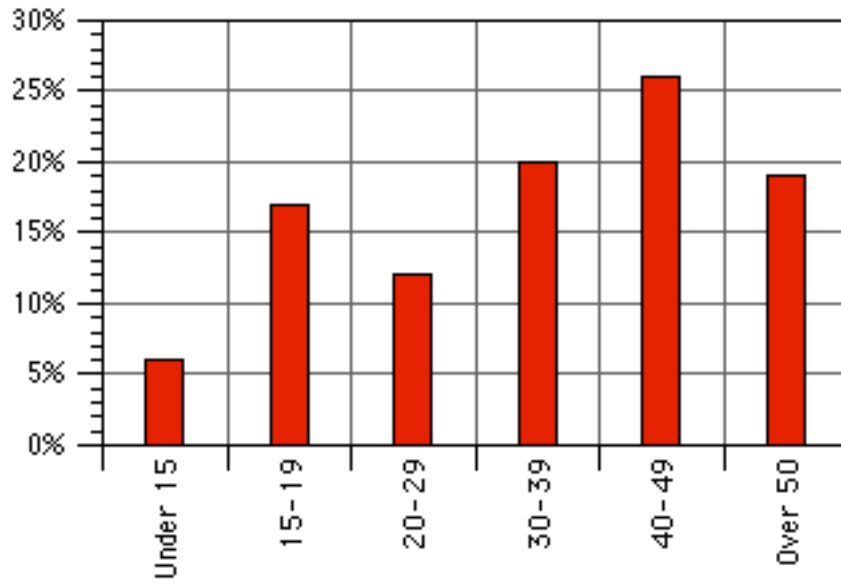
- 32% Performer and Program
- 26% Venue Costs
- 18% Salaries
- 11% Administration
- 7% Technical Fees
- 6% Marketing

### Graph 1

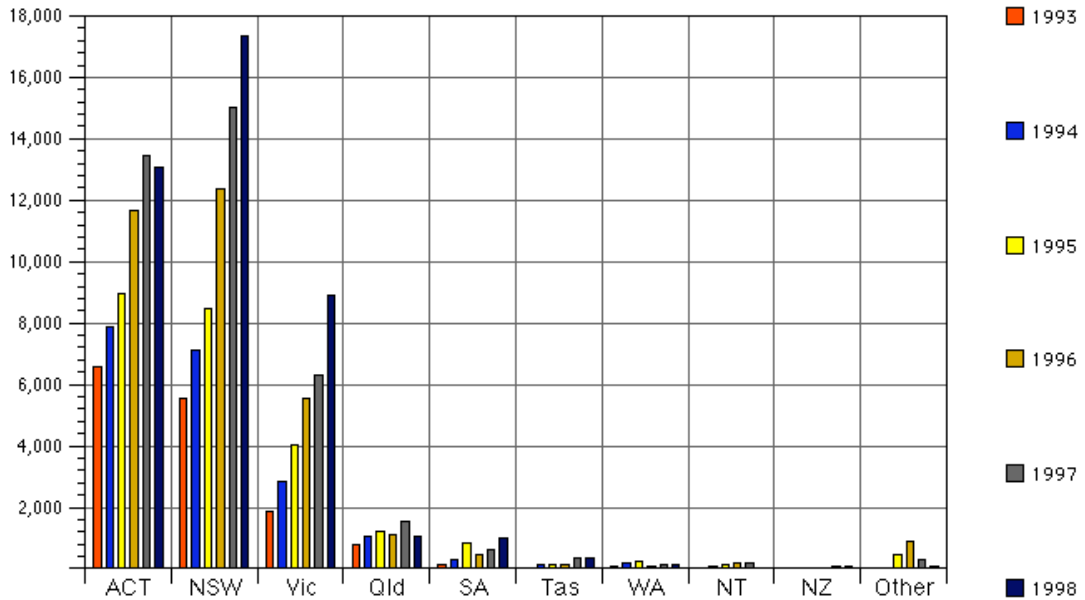
GROWTH IN ATTENDANCE 1992 - 1998



**Graph 2**  
 DEMOGRAPHICS OF FESTIVAL PARTICIPANTS 1998

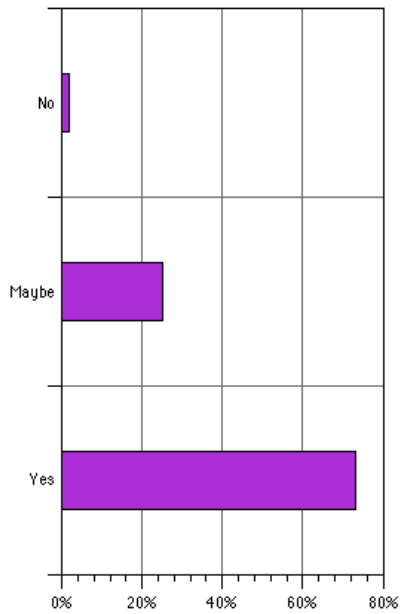


**Graph 3**  
 GROWTH IN INTERSTATE VISITORS 1993 - 1998

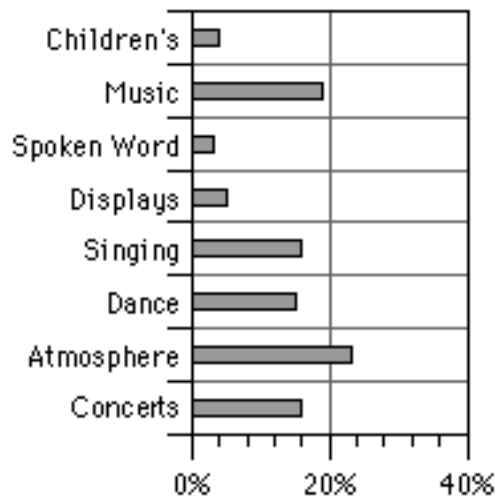


## Survey Results 1998

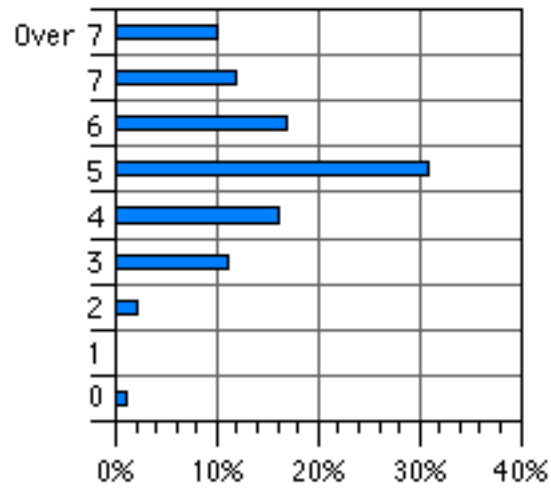
1. Will people attend again?



2. What did people come for?



### 3. Length of stay in Canberra



### 4. How They Heard About The Festival

