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Bio's for the Centenary Concert

THE CENTENARY PERCUSSION GROUP

This enthusiastic group was formed especially for the Merbein Centenary. The co-ordinator of the group is Mavis Francis. Mavis is a local teacher, the director of the children's choirs 'The Sunraysia Singers' and conductor of the adult choir 'Sing Australia'. Local residents and members of Sing Australia have practised a rhythmic sequence for many weeks. **Aleks Pusz** is the leader and instructor of the group. He is an excellent percussionist and teaches at Merbein High School and other schools in the Sunraysia area. He is a dynamic teacher and has shared his time and his passion for rhythmic work in order to form this vibrant group. He has played at many festivals including the Adelaide and Darwin Festivals and Fringes, the Melbourne Fringe, the Barossa Music Festival, the Perkusja Festival in Warsaw and WOMADelaide, including twice writing the music for WOMADelaide's annual percussion parade. His music has been played in Australia, Germany, England and Poland. He has written theme music for television, music for theatre and dance, music for orchestras, choirs, concert bands, jazz bands and drumming groups. He was Head of Percussion and Head of Composition at Charles Darwin University. He has given lectures and demonstrations at the Victorian Centre for the Arts and at Warsaw's Chopin Conservatory and has played with musicians such as James Blundell, James Morrison, Wendy Matthews and the classical trumpeter, Graham Ashton.

BUSHFIRE

Bushfire was formed 16 years ago. The original members were Steve Curran (guitar and vocals), David Harris (bass guitar and vocals) and Ken Harris (banjo, mandolin and piano accordion). The group wanted to present original songs, traditional Irish, Scottish and English tunes and selected cover songs. Over the years there have been many talented members who have come and gone but the style of music that is performed and Steve Curran have remained constant. Steve wrote the original music that is performed and has been the driving force behind the four albums that have been produced. Bushfire have performed extensively around the local area but have also travelled to a number of festivals within Australia and in Japan. Performing tonight are Merbein residents Steve Curran and Jo Curran, their son Felix Curran (on drums) and Greg Stuart (bass guitar). Melissa Tucker from Curlwa will play violin. Bushfire are delighted to welcome back especially for this performance, former Merbein South resident and band member, Megan Shaw (violin).

NIGEL HOYLE

Nigel has lived in and around Merbein all his life and is proud to be part of the Merbein Centenary celebrations. He attended Merbein Kindergarten and Merbein Primary School before attending St. Joseph's College in Mildura. He has performed on stage for 24 years. He has been involved with the Sunraysia Gang Show, Electric Light Theatre, Mildura Little Theatre, Mildura Theatre Company, Red Cliffs Musical Society, Red Cliffs Players, Mildura and District Ballet Guild, Scarlet's Theatre Restaurant and professionally with Ratbagz Comedy Theatre. He played sports such as football,

cricket, tennis, swimming and basketball at Merbein sporting clubs whilst growing up and is now a local police officer currently based at the Traffic Management Unit in Mildura.

DOMINIC CHORALE

In 1969 Rod Wells, the principal at Wentworth Central School started a male voice choir that was very successful and travelled to Adelaide to sing in the eisteddfod. Maud Crang was the accompanist. When Rod was transferred Bob Ford became the conductor. The group was then named the Dominic Chorale. The choir performs the 'Messiah' each December and has competed in the Mildura Eisteddfod regularly. Many of the people in this choir are Merbein residents.

KATIA SHEPHARD AND SHANAE TILLEY

Katia and Shanae are cousins. Katia lives in South Merbein and attends school there. Shanae attends Gol Gol School. They started playing duets together when they were 5 and have been performing together ever since. They have competed regularly in the Mildura Eisteddfod. They enjoy playing together and hope that you will enjoy their item.

CASSIE BARCO AND MATTHEW RODI

Cassie is 14 years old and is in Year 8 at Merbein Secondary College. She has lived in Merbein all of her life and has always enjoyed singing. She took singing lessons with Bianca Deckert at the beginning of Year 7. She has performed with small groups and bands for the past 18 months. In this time she has performed at Merbein Carols, Tour De Murray, ANZAC Day, Ranfurly Primary School and various other school performances. She entered the Mildura Eisteddfod this year and sang in two sections. She received an Honourable Mention. Cassie's musical influences are The Dixie Chicks and Eva Cassidy.

Matthew is currently in Year 9 at Merbein Secondary College and has been playing guitar since an early age. He has been involved with Merbein College's band program for the past two years and has performed in a variety of musical settings. His biggest musical influences are Joe Satriana and Jimi Hendrix.

JORDAN KANE

Jordan is a 15 year old student at Merbein Secondary College. She has been studying dance at the Mildura Ballet Guild since the age of 5. Her love of dance has seen her compete in the Mildura Eisteddfod since the age of 8. She has studied jazz, classical ballet and contemporary dance. In the future Jordan wishes to pursue a career in dance.

JASMINE HUDSON

Jasmine has grown up in Merbein. She is a third year Social Work student at LaTrobe University in Mildura. Singing is a hobby that she has enjoyed for many years. Significant highlights for Jasmine have been singing in the Opera by the Lock choir and the Mildura Carols by Candlelight.

ALEXANDRA WELLINGTON

Alex's pianoforte education and subsequent love of music began at the age of eight when she was lucky enough to begin learning from teacher Meg Sullivan. Although she greatly enjoyed playing sonatas, Alex also discovered an affinity for ragtime music, especially that of composer Scott Joplin,

who, curiously enough, was often heard through the lounge-room wall instead of scales. Due to the support and encouragement of family and Meg, Alex received a high distinction in her 8th grade AMEB pianoforte exam and was the recipient of the Fran Gallagher Memorial award in 2007. Alex has lived in the peaceful Merbein area by Lake Hawthorn for the entirety of her life. However she is off to Adelaide next year to study Veterinary Science.

SING AUSTRALIA

Sing Australia Mildura started in 2002. The conductor of the choir is Mavis Francis and the accompanist is Jan Thomson. It is one of the many Sing Australia choirs found throughout Australia. Many of their members are from Merbein. Sing Australia activities include fun, plenty of singing, no auditions, personal fulfilment, performances and making new friendships. Research demonstrates that singing brings health benefits, both physically and mentally. Sing Australia is based on the idea that everyone should be given the opportunity to sing in a welcoming and supportive environment. Sing Australia Mildura enjoys performing at many local events. They hope you will join in the community singing tonight with gusto and enthusiasm. Sing Australia Mildura meets on Wednesday nights from 7.30 pm-9.30 pm at the Church of Christ in Mildura. If you love to sing please join us. Phone 50251213.

VAUGHAN STIRRAT

Vaughan has lived in Merbein all her life. She lived with her family behind the Bildstein's Garage until she was married. She started learning the violin when she was 4 years old. She joined Herbert Wilson's junior orchestra in Mildura. They practised every Saturday afternoon. All the members of the orchestra who lived in Merbein would catch the bus to Mildura. She also played in Mr. Frank Zaetta's concert orchestra in the old Merbein Town Hall. She taught music for 15 years at Irymple Technical School. She trained the band and they performed at the Mildura Eisteddfod and entered the A and A competitions. They also performed at the South Street competitions in Ballarat. She has played for many musical theatre performances. She now plays with the Mildura District Orchestra and teaches music at Mildura South Primary School.

WILMA SMART

Wilma's uncles, Percy Jenner and Bert Jenner cleared blocks in Third Street Merbein in the very early days of settlement. Her mother used to ride her bike from Nichols Point to see her brothers. Wilma and her husband had a block in Irymple. When they sold it they bought land on Pump Hill and had a lovely view of the river. They lived in Merbein for 16 years. Wilma played for the Ballet Guild when Michelle Robinson was one of the teachers. She has been the accompanist for the Irymple School Choir, the Red Cliffs Musical Society, the Eisteddfod and the CWA.

SHIRLEY GILL

Throughout the many years of her passion for Spanish dance Shirley has had the huge privilege to study with world-renowned masters in eleven visits to Spain. During this time she has had some wonderful performing highlights in theatre and festivals. She has made guest appearances at shows, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, the Senior Citizens, a mayoral ball in Melbourne and the Ballet Guild's 40th Ruby performance. She was also a guest artist for the Spanish community of Melbourne where she was the only dancer for a triple festival honouring their patron saint, composer De Falla

and artist Goya. Shirley has accepted the invitation to dance for Merbein at the Centenary Concert with 'the greatest pleasure and pride.'

LARA FRANCIS

Lara is currently finishing her final year of a Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice) at the University of Adelaide Elder Conservatorium. She also has degrees in Journalism and International Studies from the University of South Australia. While finishing her music studies, Lara works at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation writing and reading radio news. She also works part time at The University of Adelaide Careers Service where she is in charge of marketing and gives career related lectures to graduates and current students. In her spare time Lara enjoys singing with the Adelaide Symphony Chorus, which performs regularly with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. She has been a soloist for the Elder Conservatorium Chorale, Adelaide Voices, The Cantabile Singers and The Police Credit Union Choir. This year Lara has also sung with the Adelaide Chamber Singers professional chamber choir and has been accepted into the South Australian State Opera Chorus. Lara will perform her debut opera role this year in the Elder Conservatorium's performance of Puccini's Gianni Schichi playing the lead role of Zita. Lara is delighted to be home to take part in the Centenary festivities and celebrate her time growing up in Merbein.

TERRY MURPHY

Terry was born at the old hospital in Merbein in 1934 to parents Richard and Josephine Murphy. He attended Our Lady's School Merbein from 1939 to 1944 and Sacred Heart College in Adelaide from 1945 to 1949. This was followed by a lifetime involvement in the dried fruit, citrus and wine grape industries in Victoria and New South Wales. He was married in 1957 to Joan Tuena and they became parents to six children: Bernadette, Timothy, Geraldine, Mary, Peter and Kieran. He enjoyed his experiences with the South Merbein and Merbein football and cricket clubs. He has been a regular member of the Merbein, Wentworth and Mildura Catholic parishes and other community groups. He has always enjoyed living, singing, reciting and telling stories. He is happy to perform at the Centenary Concert.

THE C.W.A. CHOIR

C.W.A. members from Mildura, Irymple, Merbein and Wentworth have been involved in Song in Costume and Choir for more than 25 years. They practise every Tuesday morning in the Merbein C.W.A. Hall. They have sung a great variety of music including musical comedy, songs from the shows and popular songs. Wilma Smart has been their pianist for nearly 20 years and they really appreciate her talent and personality. Over the years they have been trained by Ivan and Audrey Gates and Joyce Watmuff and remember these great people with affection. At present, Cyndy Wood is their choreographer, Jenny Wheelden is the choir leader and Margaret Boyd and Desley Rankin organise costumes. Most of the singers are in their seventies, 6 in their eighties and a few 'babies' in their sixties. More than half the 'girls' have lived in Merbein at one time and five still live there. They sing at local and state CWA festivals and take part in the Mildura Eisteddfod. They also entertain at local aged care facilities and senior citizens clubs. At present about 30 ladies are involved. They are a very happy group and love to sing.

PATRICK WITCOMBE

Patrick lived in Cabarita all his life until last year. He went to Merbein Kindergarten, Our Lady's School Merbein and St John's Church. He spent his school years heavily involved in music and the performing arts. Patrick is now studying a double degree in Law and International Relations at Flinders University in Adelaide and still enjoys performing. He is singing 'Galleries of Pink Galahs'. The song reminds him of growing up in a small country town. It depicts the happiness and the heartache we experience living in rural Australia. He remembers waking up as a child and hearing his dad playing this song on the record player every Sunday morning.

KASHMIR GRASSO

Kashmir lives in Merbein and is a student at the Mildura Senior College. She has learnt Scottish dancing for many years and has performed at numerous community events. The Sword Dance that she will dance tonight was originally danced in 1054. A Celtic prince danced it with his sword crossed over his dead enemy's sword. It was subsequently danced before battle to build strength. To kick a sword was thought to be bad luck.

AMY GREATZ

Amy was born locally and lived in Merbein for her childhood. She attended the old Merbein Kindergarten and Our Lady's Primary School. She began to learn the organ at the age of 7, swapped this for piano when she reached secondary school and continued learning through VCE. This year Amy has participated in the local musical productions of West Side Story and the Gang Show and hopes to continue her musical involvement in the community. She is currently a teacher at Chaffey Secondary College and teaches Music, Maths and Science.

JOHN BUCKLEY

John sang in a church choir from the age of 8 until his early 20's. Dr. John Buckley and his new bride Kerry moved to Mildura in 1981 for a senior registrar position at Mildura Hospital. He saw an advertisement in the Sunraysia Daily regarding the Red Cliffs Musical Society auditioning for 'The Mikado'. One day the prompt, Jenny Pay said he should meet her husband Jeff Pay, the manager of the Merbein Community Health Centre. John started to work there in 1982 and has been in Merbein ever since. John and Kerry have four daughters. He joined the Dominic Chorale in Mildura and has remained an active member. He is singing in the choir tonight. In the song 'Anthem' from the musical 'Chess' that he will sing tonight, the singer talks of longing for his homeland.

MARION TYRELL, MARGARET BOYD AND ELWYN FRANKEL

Margaret and Marion are former residents of Merbein. They are the two middle daughters of Jack and Laurie Pope. They have been involved in entertaining at many local functions. Over the last 16 years they have performed at state level competitions and have entertained at many varied clubs throughout the Sunraysia district. Recently Elwyn Frankel joined with them to perform singing trios and mime with a great deal of success. The mime they are performing this evening is taken from 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game'.

DARREN FOREMAN

Darren is married to Bronnie and they have 6 wonderful children. They live on McEdwards Street in Merbein. Darren has been a citrus grower for over 20 years and he has a retail business in Mildura called 'Mildura Mobility'. He went to the Lake Primary School and then to Merbein High. He played

tennis for the Kenny Park Tennis Club, cricket for Merbein South and golf for Merbein. He sang a few times at primary school age for local concerts and then did no other singing until about 12 years ago when he became involved with a church choir. He sings solos occasionally and enjoys the swing style-he's a crooner!

CAILLEN BIGGS

Caillen has had a connection with Merbein since 2002 when she changed schools and went to Merbein Primary School to start Grade 5. Her mother was a teacher there. Her grandmother started work at the Merbein Primary School office in 1985 and her grandfather began to work there in 1997. Her grandfather has since moved schools and is working at the Secondary College. Caillen completed Years 7 to 10 at Merbein Secondary College. She's been singing since she was 10. She started doing country music with local teacher Megan Laurie. When she was in the chorus of the Red Cliffs Musical Society production of 'Aladdin' in 2005-2006 she discovered her love for musical theatre. She's been in every show they've produced since then. She has lessons with Mrs. Shirley Bowie who has encouraged her to excel and she is very grateful for that. She recently received an Honourable Mention in the Florence Giddings Novice Aria section at the Mildura Eisteddfod. She hopes to work in musical theatre in the future as she is passionate about it and enjoys it so much.

For further information on the Merbein Centenary Opening Celebrations or any of the other events listed in the ten days of celebrations, please see www.merbeincentenary.com.au
The celebrations run from 14- 23 August 2009.

Further Enquires:

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