

LOOSELY WOVEN BETTER THAN EVER - Gary Whale

In some ways the third Loosely Woven concert was the most demanding for the organisers, but the end product was absolutely superb and made all the effort worthwhile. The Community Centre was bursting at the seams with over 140 in the audience and a cast of 42, and in places those combined voices threatened to lift the roof!

The concert began with an acknowledgement of the Yaegl people and their elders – a fitting introduction to the first song *Old Gondwana* performed by a woman we've come to know and love for her power and her passion, Sonia Bennett. From a quiet opening to the accompaniment of clapsticks, Sonia gradually built *Old Gondwana* to a stunning climax with her strong voice and driving rhythms. And that just set the scene for what was to come.



The program was a judicious blend of songs from afar, such as the Eagles' *Hotel California* and the Dixie Chicks' *Godspeed* with songs by Australian writers such as John Broomhall (*Time is a Tempest*) Bruce Watson (*Smart Bombs, Dumb Politicians*) and Eric Bogle (*The Aussie Bar-B-Q Song*), and songs written by members of Loosely Woven – Sonia Bennett's *Clarence Big River* and Kevin Murray's *The End of the Seas*, and a special arrangement of Clyde Collins' *Big River Country* as well as a beautiful setting of Dorothea McKellar's *My Country*.

There was a lot of good humour – even slapstick – with old favourites like *Here's a howdy-do* (Gilbert and Sullivan) and *Ukulele Lady*, and a rousing set of Irish jigs which saw cast members and the young people in the audience dancing and weaving their way through the narrow aisles until they were out of breath. We had a song in Mandarin (*Jin Xiang – Home Town*) and one in Hebrew (*Shir Lashalom – Song of Peace*) and a great setting of *We Shall Overcome* intertwined with the Shaker hymn

Simple Gifts as a tribute to the optimism felt by many at the election and inauguration of Barack Obama.

If you asked those present which was their favourite you would get a dozen different answers. Sonia Bennett brought back memories of the 50s with Sam Cooke's *You Send Me* (do you remember Teresa Brewer's version of it too?) and the 70s with *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* Some might choose the inspiring story of *Four Strong Women* which celebrates the actions of four British women, members of the Ploughshares peace group who, in January 1996, broke into a high security hangar owned by British Aerospace in Lancashire to disarm one of the newly built Hawk jets. These jets were due for delivery to the Indonesian Government for use against the villagers of East Timor.



But there were two songs that stood out for me. One we heard twice – Sting's *Fields of Gold*. Helen Tucker (Dorothy Collins' daughter) arranged it for two violins and cello with the glorious voice of Grafton's Kim Connor adding the lyrics, and later we heard it again with the lyrics shared by Kim and Ron Sommer, as in a conversation, with the full weight of the instruments and singers in support. It made my hair stand on end.

But what moved me most – and many in the audience too, I suspect – was Lennon and McCartney's *Hey Jude*. It's a great song, but it will always have a special resonance for many of us as we remember our good friend Judy Young, so untimely taken from us last year. And didn't we all belt it out!!

Fabulous concert, wonderful afternoon tea and terrific company. What else could you want on a Sunday afternoon?

Photos by Laura O'Brien



Editor's note: Many thanks go to Barbara and Gary Whale, Marea and Bob Buist, Laura and Barry O'Brien, Sammy Hunt, Paul Hutchings, Dorothy Collins, Yvonne Hughes, Chris Seale, Anne McPherson, Daphne McPherson, Joyce Bell, and in particular, Yvonne and Keith Redman and their granddaughters Emily, Laura and Chloe.

Young Chloe thoroughly enjoyed the concert, singing and dancing, but it all proved too much for her in the end. Thanks also to the members who supplied the delicious afternoon tea, and those who generously billeted members of Loosely Woven.



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