

Monaro Musings

Volume 32, Number 1 – April 2025



The Newsletter of the Monaro Folk Society Inc., Reg No A 00208
www.monarofolk.org.au www.facebook.com/monaro.folk.society

The Prez Says

Hi everyone

The Society has had a strong start to 2025, with good numbers of dancers and musicians at Dancing in the Park (despite the heat and storms) and at other events as they have restarted for the year. The Merry Muse has been very active as well, including a feature concert with Enda Kenny in February, and a vibrant and well-supported "Women in Song" showcase in March.

Our plans for a whole of society gathering have progressed, with the event to be held at the Weston Creek community centre on Saturday 10 May (thank you PM for calling the election for a week earlier instead). It will be a full afternoon and evening of music and dance, featuring many of our sub-groups over the course of the day. It will also be a great opportunity to catch up with other Society members and to meet new people as well. And the whole thing will be free of charge. Further details to follow soon.

I would also like to express condolences to Colin Towns on the passing of his partner June Staunton in late December last year. I understand that Colin will be organising a dance in her honour in a couple of months' time.

I look forward to seeing you at a Society event soon.

Cheers

David

New model for Merry Muse

In 2025 there are changes to the operation of the Merry Muse to provide more variety in the shows we present.

There will still be the opportunity for local artists to participate in blackboards with some shows running with one feature act and 8 blackboard spots and others with 4 blackboard spots. However, there will be shows offered in other formats. The following table shows the main approach to shows:

Show format can vary from:

Show format	Blackboard	Ticket Price	
		MFS Members/Concessions	Full
1 x feature act 45-minute	8 x 15-min spots	\$5	\$8
2 x local / lesser-known touring Acts 45 Minutes sets	4 x 15-min spots	\$10	\$15
1 feature act 2 x 45-minute sets	4 x 15-min spots	\$10	\$15
Themed show (e.g. Women of Song)	n/a	\$10	\$15
Touring artists 2 x 45-minute sets	3 x 15-min spots or local support	\$20	\$25

Given the changes we are setting up online booking with Try Booking and getting a Square to enable us to accept card payments at the door. We will continue to accept cash.

Artists when they apply to play at the Merry Muse will be given this information – and will be made aware that as we are a low-key folk club we do not undertake extensive publicity and they will be encouraged to actively do their own promotion. Artists will be paid by electronic transfer after supply of an invoice and ABN or Statement by a Supplier form.

Re finances, the Merry Muse will generally keep 10 percent of ticket sales less costs, including sound and booking fees. Note that sound for regular shows is done by volunteers who do not charge. The raffle will be a little more discretionary – with up to 50 percent for the Merry Muse to fund later activities.

International Women's Day at the Merry Muse

With second Sunday in March this year coming just one day after the official date for International Women's Day, The Merry Muse Folk Club celebrated this important day at Canberra Irish Club on 9 March with a special Women of Song concert. The special concert showcased some of Canberra's best female singer songwriters and performers, including Daisy Chain, Cassidy Richens and Mary Firkins, Simone (with Craig), Turnip Sundae, Divine Devilles and Wallabindi.

There was a haze of purple in the audience, listening to songs about love, life, struggle, heartache and victory, songs which honoured the achievements of women and reflected on progress achieved towards an inclusive and equitable future.



The purple in the audience and MC Eileen Newmarch



D J Gosper and the Divine Devilles



Cassidy Richens and Mary Firkins



Wallabindi



Daisy Chain

Dylan and the New York folkies (with an Australian footnote)

There has been some controversy about the portrayal of Pete Seeger in James Mangold's Bob Dylan biopic, *A Complete Unknown*, starring Timothee Chalamet as Dylan. The film plays a bit fast and loose with the actual historical facts at times but that's OK. It's a dramatisation not a documentary and Dylan and Seeger are both presented in the round.

But not everyone agrees. Writing on the *Pennlive* website Amy Woden, who describes herself as "a child of the Pete Seeger generation," hails Seeger as a singer, songwriter and activist, who championed civil rights, farmworker and labour rights and the environment, defied Congress during the Red Scare of the 1950s and stood against militarism during the Vietnam War and the anti-nukes movement in the 1980s. His music influenced generations. Woden thinks James Mangold threw Seeger under the bus portraying him "as a dust-covered relic of folk music history, an obstacle to Dylan's fame, even as it was Seeger who opened the door for him."

Edward Norton, who plays Seeger in the film, singing his songs and singing them very well, has a more nuanced view, which I found more convincing: "Pete Seeger's integrity and value system can coexist with Dylan's," he told *Variety*,

"Pete Seeger is Pete Seeger, and he's got all kinds of admirable integrity in his lane of the type of person he was. And Dylan has an artistic integrity, and for a while, they were in the same lane, and then they weren't in the same lane ... If you listen to Dylan today, he reveres Pete Seeger and admires and appreciates him. But you can love and appreciate and revere someone and need to break away from them. And (like Seeger) you can be proud of someone and still have expectations of them, that they might owe you something."

You can't understand Seeger in the early '60s, Norton told another interviewer, unless you understand that he had to play summer camps for 10 years for 20 bucks after being blacklisted: "In the '60s, he's reaping what he sowed through a very rough period. If you don't understand that, you can't understand the layers of emotion in the wonderful period from '62 to '64, where it feels like days of heaven to him."

Dylan's new sound and his rock star persona challenged Seeger's dream of people singing together as part of a movement for social change. He saw Dylan's electric bracket as "some of the most destructive music this side of hell."

To describe his feelings, he paraphrased a poem he'd written about cancer (*The Beast with a Hundred Claws*):

*The fangs and claws sink swiftly deeper now
First the muscles, then the brain
The fangs reach for the heart, and victory is won
And when we reach for him, we have only the shrivelled corpse*

Dylan felt he was a casualty too. Singer Maria Muldaur asked him to dance at the Newport performers' party. He replied: "I would dance with you, Maria, but my hands are on fire." Of course, as *A Complete Unknown* brings out, Dylan's electric bracket was an artistic triumph, a magic moment in 60s history.

I'll leave the last words on the controversy to American folk scholar Benjamin Filene. He thinks Seeger "should have listened more carefully to what Dylan was saying". Dylan "remained fundamentally committed to drawing on American roots music to produce vibrant new songs grounded firmly in tradition ... His post-1965 work represents a transmutation, not an abdication of the folk-stylist role."

Seeger and Australia

There's an Australian footnote. As recounted in Keith Mckenry's *More than a life; John Meredith and the fight for Australian tradition*, the Bush Music Club in Sydney raised funds for Seeger when he was being hounded for "Un-American activities". In turn Seeger became subscriber and occasional contributor to the club's magazine, *Singabout*.

One day, out of the blue, club secretary Alan Scott received a letter from Seeger seeking advice on a possible Australian tour. Scott wrote back "saying that as much as he admired him he would rather he didn't come to Australia as they were having trouble battling American pop songs, but if he did come he would be welcome."

In the end, Seeger toured Australia in 1963 and was made very welcome by the club, attending a special workshop night with Alan Scott and John Dengate writing a song to mark the visit. Seeger's interview with traditional singer and former shearer, Duke Tritton including Tritton singing *Shearing in a Bar* can be seen on YouTube. There's also a DVD:

If you want to read up on Dylan and the New York folkies, Elijah Wald's *Dylan Goes Electric! Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night that Split the Sixties*, the book that inspired the film, will tell you what really happened that night and sets Newport 1965 in context. It focuses on the Dylan/Seeger contrast.

A new Australian book, Chris O'Connor's *You Don't Need a Weatherman: Bob Dylan for Beginners*, has far too modest a title insofar as it would appeal to long-standing Dylan fans as well as beginners inspired by *A Complete Unknown*. It takes the Dylan story right up to his 2020 album *Rough and Rowdy Ways*.

Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (2000) is a comprehensive academic study of roots music in twentieth century America, including various folk revivals. It has a chapter on Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan.

Numeralla

The Numeralla festival is a unique event. A "free folk festival" with free camping ...

You will either love it or wonder why you bothered driving out. For non locals it is a campout. You can camp on "that" side of the river, packed in with those who have been coming every year, a mix of dedicated folkies and non-folkie families. The sessions go on quite late, and old timey and Irish are the dominant genres. Or you can camp on the "other side" of the river near the tennis courts, where 10pm is bedtime and the music is more Aussie, the toilets are better and there is lots of room.

The festival is focused in the hall, Friday is a welcome session with organised performers, Saturday starts with a couple of morning workshops and then a continuous black board concert midday to evening. The performers are a mix of talent, experience and style, but the brackets are short. I did hear a brilliant guitarist which was a high point.

Saturday evening is the dance. It's a roll up all inclusive band, led by Ray Mulligan, Fran and Lawrie called a range of simple inclusive bush dances. It was fun... fun to dance... fun to be in the band. Sunday is a small local market, a workshop and a short blackboard concert. A poet's session happens both Saturday and Sunday mornings, very well attended, it is in the tennis club hall... (not really a breakfast as no food available, but someone was providing coffee.)

Particular thanks to MFS's Ian Bull who organised, transported and operated the sound system for the whole festival this year.

The festival is funded by food and drink sales and there was an army of volunteers in the kitchen, behind the bar and by the barbie. Thanks to all.

Moir Holmes



Wee Jasper

Wee Jasper Contra in the Caves 2024 took place on Saturday 18th January followed by some great dancing at Wee Jasper Memorial Hall. Wee Jasper is about 50 kilometres from Yass and 80 kilometres from Canberra. Set in a spectacular limestone landscape, Careys Cave features beautiful, naturally sculpted rock and a wealth of different cave formations. Access is down a flight of 30 steps, after which floors are mostly level with well-trodden and lit paths passing through various chambers.

Thanks to David Hunter for the photos



Síomha at the Gang Gang Café

Irish artist Síomha (pronounced shee-va, the name means "good peace") stopped off in Canberra between Port Fairy and Blue Mountains festival to give a concert in the lovely setting of the Gang Gang Café in Downer.

Tour manager and ex Canberra resident Andrea Kirwin provided a fine bracket of her own songs as support act (to follow her lovely celebration of the songs of Tracy Chapman at The Street Theatre a few weeks before).

Accompanied by Martin Atkinson on keyboard Síomha sang in both Irish and English, mainly songs from her album *Infinite Space*. Songs seeing calm in a troubled world, seeking "good peace" in fact (whether through meditation or appreciating a red sky coming home from a gig at four in the morning).



The songs crossed genres (pop, soul, jazz, indie folk). Síomha was good at getting the audience to join in harmonies and finger clicking.

While I liked her own songs. the highlights for me were two covers – one of Sinéad O'Connor's *Black Boys on Mopeds* and the closing number (a kind of preventive but much appreciated pre-encore), that classic Irish song set in Louisiana made famous by Paul Brady, *The Lakes of Pontchartrain* sung as *Gaeilge* (in Irish), something I'd never heard before, and done beautifully (my Year 12 equivalent Irish was enough to make out words like Pontchartrain).

MFS Group Contacts

Bush Dancing	Mark Simmons 0421 814 718
Contra Dancing	Rob Mahony 6251 1287
English Country Dancing	Colin Towns 0417 020 615
Irish Set Dancing	Christine Briton 0413 168 562
Australian Settlers Music Session	Ray Mulligan 0422 636 442
Tuesday Night Music Group	Julie Szabo 0414 407 658
Merry Muse Folk Club	Eileen Newmarch 0412 127 882
Canberra Celtic Choir	Anna Brown canberracelticchoir1@gmail.com

Monaro Musings is published by, Monaro Folk Society Inc, PO Box 334, Mawson, ACT 2607. Views expressed by the Editor (Declan O'Connell, editor@monarofolk.org.au) and others in Monaro Musings are not necessarily those of the Monaro Folk Society. For general enquiries contact us at info@monarofolk.org.au

Monaro Folk Society, Inc. 2024-25 Committee

President: David Ball - president@monarofolk.org.au

Secretary: Ian Bull - secretary@monarofolk.org.au

Treasurer: Moir Holmes - treasurer@monarofolk.org.au;

Public Officer: Antonella Salpietro - publicofficer@monarofolk.org.au

Committee Members, Rebecca Tarrant, Rita Turnbull, Colin Towns, Matthew Gibbins, Tina Lynam