

Monaro Musings

Volume 29, Number 5 – December 2020



The Newsletter of the Monaro Folk Society Inc., Reg No A 00208

www.monarofolk.org.au

www.facebook.com/monaro.folk.society

From the President

Hi everyone

Welcome to the end of 2020! It has been a challenging year in so many ways. I'm sure that we are all looking forward to better times ahead in 2021.

As you may be aware, a gradual restart of the Society's dance activities is underway, in the form of Dancing in the Park in December and January. I see this as one way of gauging what appetite there may be for a larger restart of our dance activities as we move into the first part of 2021 proper. I hope that we will get a decent turnout across all our dance groups for DITP, which could then provide a starting point for further interim activities even though a full restart may not yet be feasible by February.

The 2020-2021 MFS committee has been using this pause in dancing as an opportunity to do some longer term thinking about the Society's activities, and about how we might organise them more strategically. We are particularly keen to see pathways put in place to enable both new dancers and existing dancers to develop their knowledge, skills and repertoire, which they can then pass on to others.

I expect that this will require us to be more systematic and structured in the dances that we choose to do each week, but I am confident that there will be excellent payoffs from it both in the short term and in the longer term.

As a committee, we are also keen to give some thought to how our various groups can be better integrated with each other. This doesn't mean changing repertoire or losing each group's distinctive style. It does mean, I think, seeking to find commonalities between the styles, and also encouraging greater participation (from callers, musicians and dancers alike) across multiple styles.

The various music sessions that have been able to keep going through use of people's homes and alternative venues now have the prospect of taking the next step back towards normality. The Slow Sessions are already back at the Irish Club (though with restrictions on numbers) and the TiN MuGs have been invited back there from February. We are also in contact with the Irish Club about a restart of the Merry Muse.

On the music front, I am conscious that we have a diverse group of musicians, with a diverse level of skills and a diverse set of musical interests. I am keen for us to figure out some ways of providing additional opportunities for those who want to develop their knowledge and skills further, such as by playing in smaller combos rather than only in larger sessions or workshops.

These thoughts are all, of course, still at a fairly early stage of development, and further ideas are always welcome, as is feedback :-)

I wish you and your loved ones a very merry Christmas, and a happy new year, and I look forward to much more music and dancing in the year ahead.

Cheers

David

The Tuesday Night Music Group (TiN MuGs)

Beginnings

The Tuesday Night Music Group (otherwise known as the TiN MuGs) is one of the MFS's longest running institutions. It was started by Daryl Powell in 1992.

Daryl (pictured here on accordion) was an expert musician and teacher of dance and formed this group to give beginners and intermediate players a chance to play with support from more experienced musicians and build their confidence with the safety in numbers.



It met in people's homes on Tuesday nights as that was the only night that other music and dance groups within the Monaro Folk Society were not meeting at the time.

Julie Szabo Banton, who has been the group's coordinator since 2008 first joined in 2000 and remembers what a great feeling it was for somebody just coming back into music after a long break to be able to play in a welcoming group. She remembers the first night, seated with her 12-string guitar between Daryl and a mandolin player, as feeling like being in string heaven.

Daryl and his wife, Diana, were both major forces in the MFS from the 1990s onwards with Diana, an expert dance caller, teaching the dancers, and Darryl leading the music.

They started Bush Dance lessons in 1991 and, from 1993, ran Dancing in the Park and the Children's Dances, which were held at the Yarralumla Woolshed in March and October every year. When Daryl and Diana took over the Children's Dances, the Tuesday Night Music Group came with them to provide the music. Daryl was honoured with the Order of Australia for his services to music. Sadly, he died in 2018.

Becoming TiN MuGs

The Children's Dances led the way to performances at a wide range of venues, including Floriade, the multicultural festival, school fetes, the Celtic fair, various Canberra club venues and retirement communities, the MFS AGM (back in those far off pre-Zoom days) and Dancing in the Park.

The title of Tuesday Night Music Group was certainly factual but not exactly the catchiest name for a band. The shift to TinMuGs came about five years ago when about 10 of the band were invited to play at the Irish Embassy to play for the Ambassador and friends at some official afternoon of Shenanigans.

They wanted a name to introduce the band and TiN MuGs was the result. Funnily enough, the band was introduced that way but Julie recalls that when the Ambassador thanked the band publicly, he referred to them as "The Rusty Tins".

This has not happened since and, from that point, TiN MuGs became the established name in everyday use and for the Bush Dances they played. And with the name, came a logo (at right).



Tin MuGs Now

Over the years, the size of the group has gradually increased. Most TiN MuGs sessions now attract around twenty players, with a good mix of the different string and wind instruments and the accordion family. As the numbers have grown, so has the range of instruments, with additions such as the hammer dulcimer, bouzouki, harp and different percussion.

The group still gets together on Tuesday, mostly in the evenings, but, these days, with the changing demographic, there is the occasional afternoon session. The tradition of meeting in people's homes has continued but around five years ago the group moved to the Irish Club for the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Where there is a fifth Tuesday, the venue was Goodwin Village. From the middle of this year the group has been meeting on Tuesday afternoons in the LDK retirement community auditorium in Tuggeranong.

The Irish Club has been off-limits for most of this year because of COVID restrictions but the group has been invited back from February 2021, all being well. Fingers crossed!



At the Irish Club



2004 at the Yarralumla Woolshed



Cooleman Court

TiN MuGs Music

The music the group plays is mainly a combination of dance and folk tunes in wide range of styles—jigs, mazurkas, waltzes and songs etc—and from a wide range of traditions, including the Australian settlers, Irish, English, Scottish and some European. However, it also includes many more recently Australian-composed songs, including by local composers such as Brian Ridge; and many “outside the box” favourites contributed by members.

The repertoire is constantly increasing. In the early days, the group relied mainly on commercially produced books of tunes but over time, as members brought in tunes to play, the song sheets were combined into books with there now being around 700 songs in the various compilations. Maurie Layne and Moir Holmes have been very busy compiling recent books (for Christmas and Bush Dances), and resetting and reprinting the existing books. Others who have helped a lot with this and deserve a mention are Dave Wardle, Bill Galer and Robert Hayes.



Over time, there have been changes in the standard of play. TiN MuGs is no longer really a beginners' group. Its players range from intermediate to semi-professional and professional standard. However, it is still strictly non-auditioned and the Tuesday sessions still keep their highly informal atmosphere, including acceptance of mistakes and the freedom to play what you can and sit out the rest.

Many in the group find it the ideal environment in which to test out their skills on a new instrument and it is great opportunity for people unsure of where they stand to give it a go and see how it works for them. People interested in joining or just sitting in on a session can get the details from Julie (see end page for the list of MFS organisers). *(Thanks to Julie for the photos and background for this article).*



Music in the home—pre-social distancing. Centre is Tim Greeves, a Northumbrian Piper, who played with the group in 2015. Tim wrote 'Into the Wind' - a great tune with a beautiful harmony that is a TiN MuGs favourite.

Polly Garland



Polly Garland was well-known in the Australian folk music world as an extremely talented multi-instrumentalist, a superb accompanist and music teacher, and a friendly face with a playful sense of fun. She was expert on piano, piano accordion, autoharp and various duet concertinas, but could also play anglo and English systems. She also played harps, banjo, violin, cello, mandola, ukulele, Ukrainian Bandura, tin whistle, recorder, mouth organ, electric guitar, bass guitar, dulcimers, diatonic button accordions and other instruments.

Polly was born Angela Garland in England. Her musical career started at a very young age, first on the recorder, then piano, for which she achieved very high grades during her early teens. She played cello in several youth orchestras, and the grand pipe organ at a number of venues in Bristol. She gained qualifications in secretarial work and teaching.

In England Polly met and married Malcolm Clapp, back visiting his native UK. She changed her name from Angela to Polly, saying she felt she had "never lived up to the expectations of being 'an angel', and she liked the sound and the 'Englishness' of Polly".

Malcolm was 'instrumental' in introducing Polly to the concertina, piano accordion and folk music. He says she "took to the concertina like a duck to water", especially the duet, which she was playing reasonably well within a few weeks. Polly's sight-reading skills were "magnificent", but "ear-playing for folk music was a challenge for her initially".

Polly and Malcolm played with a UK West Country concertina group, and travelled to London for International Concertina Association meetings, where classical pieces, hymns and wartime songs were the norm. They "decided to liven things up a bit by playing 'Puppet on a String', and it went down surprisingly well for such a conservative group."

Malcolm recalls that perhaps the highlight of Polly's musical career was when renowned concertina player Alistair Anderson invited her to play Bach with him at a concert during the UK's Sidmouth Folk Festival, after them having just met, and Polly having been playing concertina for less than a year, though of course very familiar with Bach.

In 1985 Polly and her son Daniel, from a previous marriage, moved to Australia, where they lived with Malcolm in Sydney, then Woy Woy. Polly immersed herself in the folk scene, where she made great friends and had wonderful experiences. She attended the newly established concertina sessions at Tritton Hall, from which grew the Concertina Band, and she played with the Heritage Ensemble. Friends from that era all comment on her remarkable musical talent, and Helen Romeo remembers "how appreciative and encouraging Polly was of other people's musicianship, no matter what stage they were in their musical journey".

Polly and Daniel lived in the Illawarra through the nineties, when it was becoming a hub of bush/colonial dance music, with the rise of the Wongawilli Band and Colonial Dancers. Polly taught piano, and became involved in the Illawarra Folk Club, Jamberoo Folk Festival and various Wongawilli events. She became accompanist to Bob McInnes' Stringfiddle band, playing for bush dances, concerts, balls and other gigs over many years. Her musical activity in the area also involved accompanying an Italian classical singer, and accompanying blues with singer Ali Barber. Dave de Santi and Rob Willis said Polly helped them with some of the early Pioneer Performers monographs.

In the late nineties Polly and Richard Depledge moved to a small farm near Cobargo, which allowed Polly to have a full menagerie, and indulge her fascination with donkeys. Polly and Richard got involved in the local folk club (Yuin) and the Cobargo Festival committee, and Polly attended regular sessions at Cobargo and Candelo. Bob McInnes recalls that during that time Polly gave him a chance to reconnect with the world of Scottish Country Dancing and they played for many dances and balls over the years.

I met Polly through the Wongawilli mob, in the mid-nineties, on a wonderful bus trip, playing, dancing and singing our way to Victor Harbour Folk Festival. I remember appreciating not only how amazing Polly's musical skills were, but also how open, friendly and helpful she was, and that irreverent sense of humour.

Bill Galer, with whom Polly shared her last sixteen years, in Canberra and the Brisbane region, says he too met Polly through Wongawilli, at their Folk Music School around 2004, when taking one of her accordion classes. He says "she was wonderful with people and often started friendly conversations with complete strangers."

In Canberra, Polly again immersed herself in local sessions, such as the weekly TiN MuGs (Tuesday Night Music Group) in which she was an 'elder', and shared her skills and talents with others. Bush Traditions organisation was also flourishing, so Polly and Bill participated in their annual 'Gatherings', local sessions and their National Folk Festival 'Settlers Sessions'. In recent years they also participated in the newly established Concertina Convergence.

Back in UK days, Polly and Malcolm had scoured junk shops for sheet music, and she would sing the tunes to see whether they were worth buying. This thirst for wonderful tunes continued at our National Folk Festival each year, when Wayne Richmond and Polly would buy up the shop's tune books, then find a nook to try them out.

To quote Bill, Polly had an insatiable interest in "everything around her and everything not around her (such as Iceland, volcanos, donkeys, weather etc.)", and she learnt Russian, and spoke some Italian and French. She was "a firm believer in the protection of the environment, and had no prejudices (except for dodgy politicians!)."

Polly had an intense interest in aircraft and flying, so Bill who worked as an aeronautical engineer, shouted her a flying lesson for her 60th birthday, at which she was incredibly relaxed and competent.

In 2018/19, while in remission from her long battle with cancer, Polly enjoyed time in Tasmania with Daniel and Fiona and her young grandsons Lycan and Lazarus. She connected with the Hobart Society of Recorder Players and the community group 'Huon Heritage'.

Polly passed away peacefully in Canberra, with Daniel, or Bill constantly with her during the last few days. She recalled the happy times that she had playing with so many friends at the NFF and other venues.

Compiled by Carole Helman, 28/11/2020 - based on notes from Bill Galer, Malcolm Clapp, Richard Depledge, Helen Romeo, Greg Wilson, Dave Johnson, Ralph Pride, Wayne Richmond, Bob McInnes, Rob Willis, David de Santi, Ray Mulligan, Moir Holmes, Julie Szabo Banton, Daniel and Fiona Mason. Photograph from Bill Galer.

(This tribute is a condensed version from an article on the [NSW Folk Federation website](#), which has more photos and anecdotes)

Shadow Dancing



Twilight Dancing In The Park—Stage 88. More photos on page 10.

Leaders and followers

It's a matter of taste as to how much you intellectualise your pleasures, but the philosopher (and keen dancer), Professor Clair Wills, had some interesting things to say in a recent *New York Review of Books* [article](#). A small selection is below.

"The point about dancing is not to be like anything, or compared with anything, not to be this or that, but to be...

In partner dancing there is a leader and a follower, and early on I realized that the obvious choice for me was to learn to follow. It was not simply my gender (many women choose to lead) and my size (not very tall), but that I had for years been learning to follow without knowing it.

Following is reading. Reading is the ultimate transferable skill, which is lucky as it is my principal skill, a kind of overdeveloped interpretative tendency I find hard to turn off.

I apply it everywhere and was most reassured to realize I could apply it to dancing too. In fact, it was required.

Each dance is a small—four- or five-minute—collaboration. There are actually two leaders. One is the person you are dancing with, who leads you through a series of figures in time with the music. And the other is the music itself.

The task of the follower is to listen to both of them, to hear them, and to respond creatively in turn.

It is like reading a poem, or a very short story, and making something new of them inside your head, except in the case of dancing that something new has to be expressed as movement. Here reading becomes writing, tracing lines and figures in space.

The best dances happen when the leader in turn responds to the follower's movement, and the distinction between call and response becomes muddled..."



Is Dancing Good For Your Health?

Academics Study Dance

Dancing in the MFS is still COVID-quiet so it is another general interest topic for the dance section of this newsletter. When you are looking around the bits and pieces on the web you often read that dancing is good for you. I am pretty sure most dancers would agree with that but I was curious to see whether this was just a feeling or whether you could actually prove that it is true.

A quick wander through the online academic databases shows that quite a few people have thought this was worth studying. Just a brief search found around 50 articles about the benefits of dancing and there are probably more. Most are reports of specific research projects but several are reviews of the published literature to give a picture of what the combined evidence from the different projects tells us.

What Does 'Good For Your Health' Mean?

One of the first things you find is that there are lots of different ways of thinking about 'good for your health'. Some studies look at whether it prevents or ameliorates particular diseases, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's. Some look at physical health and some at mental. Many look at the impact on falls prevention and balance. Most focus on the aged but a significant minority look at the role of dance in therapy for other age groups.

Dancing and Alzheimers

A particularly interesting issue was the impact of dancing on brain function—particularly whether it promotes neuroplasticity—the process of forming and renewing nerve connections that can help stave off the onset of forgetfulness and Alzheimer's. One study, based on before and after cognition tests, thought that it did.

The argument behind this, which seems convincing at first sight, is that dancing, particularly the more free-form varieties, requires rapid decision-making (see the previous article on leaders and followers), which exercises the brain and promotes healthy connections. Unfortunately, another study which tested this hypothesis by way of brain scans, found no physical evidence that this was happening. But undoubtedly not the last word.

Can We Prove Anything?

The studies do overwhelmingly point to dancing having real health benefits. Dancing, apart from anything else, is a form of exercise and a form of exercise you enjoy is one you are more likely to continue. It generally seems to improve and maintain balance. The social side supports mental well-being.

You couldn't say it is absolute proof. Findings in one study are not always replicated in another; the number of people studied is often small; and many studies do not cope well with the need to control for other factors. For example, if dancers are healthier it may be because healthier people are more likely to dance rather than the impact of dancing. Projects also tend to rely on volunteers who may not be completely representative of the population being studied.

From an academic point of view, we need to find a country willing and able to force a statistically significant proportion of its population into dancing (and into making an effort whether they wanted to or not). However, until that happens, on the basis of the work we have, it does seem clear that dancing is a lot more likely to be good for you than bad (unless you slip).

On with the dance! Let joy be unconfined. Lord Byron



As some of you may know, I left the ACT in 2016 to move to a retirement village in Queensland.

It is a lovely location, just north of Gold Coast, between Brisbane and the coast, walking distance from Moreton Bay.

During the first two years here I did a lot of travel, both in Australia and overseas, and I'm still keeping busy with some of the things I already did in ACT, such as writing articles for a Dutch Australian newspaper.

Thus, I didn't have much time to chase up folk clubs in this area, but in 2017 I did find the Folk Redlands club. They have blackboard concerts with one featured act, on the 3rd Sunday of the month. We were in a room of a community building in a lovely area, part park and part natural bushland, called Indigiscapes.

The building also had a café in a room adjacent to ours, and everyone was happy with this arrangement. Unfortunately, the local government that owns the building, decided to close it during 2019 for renovation.

We found a temporary venue at a local country music club that has their own building and welcomed us. Because this venue was about 10km further along the coast, we did lose quite a few members, and we were hoping they would return once we were back at the old venue.

However, in April 2020, when the renovation was complete, we discovered that we had to use a much smaller room, and the owner also decided to charge us a fee that we could not afford.

At that time the Covid lock down started. In these times of electronic communications we found a solution - Zoom. We continued offering blackboard performances, to anyone who wanted to join in via Zoom, and we offered everyone who was interested a link to watch the performances on our Facebook page.

This turned out to be a great success. Each Zoom presentation was participated by at least six individual performers, or duos, and sometimes as many as twelve. Performers played at their homes, in front of their computers (or Ipads or mobile phones).

No groups participated because everyone was in lock-down so only couples could perform together. We had a couple perform from the US East Coast, and another from the UK. These performers must have been very keen as our connections were live, and the time difference meant they were forsaking some sleep. I'm not sure how they found out about us.

We started the Zoom meetings in May and they ran till September. The first one was attended live by 49 people, and we had about 15 acts (20 people). I believe it has now been posted on YouTube.

For June we decided to introduce a theme "Lighten the Day", and Zoom performers were around the same number, with about 70 viewers. Our July theme was "One giant leap for mankind", with performances by 13 acts (17 performers), and an audience of about 65. Our 4th theme (August) was "Dress to Impress", which was an invitation to performers to use fancy dress. The final Zoom performances were in September, theme was "Spring has Sprung", with performances and audience in similar numbers.

Then, in October we were able to meet in person again and offered a blackboard afternoon as a Welcome Back. This event took place in a new permanent venue, a lawn bowls club in Victoria Point. The three meetings we had there have been a great success, and we hope to stay here indefinitely.

Meanwhile, I became secretary of the club for the past two years and have now become the treasurer. Former Canberran Lisa Maps has also joined us.

I'd like to invite any MFS members, who are coming to the Gold Coast or Brisbane area, to visit our club. You can find information on our Facebook page, or our website: www.facebook.com/FolkRedlands and <https://folkredlands.org>

Dancing Again in the Park

Dancing in the Park resumed on Monday 7 December on Stage 88 with a great turnout of dancers, with dances called by Peter Foster and Mark Simmons and music supplied by the Bush Capital Band. Special COVID safety procedures were in place for the carefully chosen dances and proved to be no barrier to the joy of dancing once again.



MFS Dance and Music Sessions Contacts

As most sessions are now either in hibernation or operating in ways that are liable to sudden change due to the COVID situation, members interested in joining, should disregard previously advertised session times and get in touch with the contacts listed below.

Monday Dance Workshops	Mark Simmons 0421 814 718
Contra	Linda Aunela 0437 350 254 lindaunela@yahoo.com.au
English Country Dancing	Colin Towns 0417 020 615
Irish Set Dancing	Christine 0413 168 562
Australian Settlers Music	Ray Mulligan 6247 4725
Tuesday Night Music Group	Julie 6282 3523 or Robert 6291 9135

Other Dance and Music Sessions Contacts

Canberra Celtic Choir	canberraceltticchoir1@gmail.com
Canberra Scottish Fiddlers	markjenner@grapevine.com.au
Canberra Shanty Club	Mondays 7.00 pm. Old Canberra Inn.
Earthly Delights Historic Costume Balls	Aylwen Garden 6281 1098.
English Traditional Music Sessions	Jackie Luke 0417 679 139
Folk Dance Canberra	Lesley Rose 6286 6401 folkdancecanberra@gmail.com
Hoskintown Acoustic Kitchen Jam	Diane Cross 0402 644 450.
Jammalong	Dianne Porter porter32@bigpond.com
Murrumbateman Acoustic Music Club	wal.brewer@gmail.com
Old Time American Jam Session	Donna Vaughan 6258 9485
Queanbeyan Bush Poets	Laurie McDonald 6253 9856 or 0432 488 828.
Saturday Slow Session	Anna at acrab@netspeed.com.au
Surly Griffin Morris	Simon Wall 0404 859 404

Monaro Musings is published by, Monaro Folk Society Inc, PO Box 482 Civic Square ACT 2608. Views expressed by the Editor and others in *Monaro Musings* are not necessarily those of the Monaro Folk Society.

Monaro Folk Society, Inc. 2020-21 Committee

President: David Ball - president@monarofolk.org.au; Vice-President: Peter Stringfellow; Secretary: Ian Bull - secretary@monarofolk.org.au; Treasurer: Rod Peters - treasurer@monarofolk.org.au; Public Officer: Antonella Salpietro; Committee Members, Linda Aunela, Rebecca Tarrant, John Hewat, Colin Towns. For general enquiries please use secretary@monarofolk.org.au

Appointed Officials

Membership: Christine Gifford - membership@monarofolk.org.au; Merry Muse Coordinator: Vacant; Merry Muse PA Coordinator: Pierre Sibilant; *Monaro Musings* Editor: Keith Ogborn - editor@monarofolk.org.au; Bookkeeper: Linda Aunela - payments@monarofolk.org.au; Web Manager: Neil Glassford - webmaster@monarofolk.org.au