

## Ashes to Music: Mallacoota 2020/21

Padma Newsome, 9/1/21. ed. Helen Meredith

In June of 2020, Robin Bryant, CHIRF secretary, and myself, Padma Newsome, local musician, applied for and were pleased to receive a Newscorp/FRRR (Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal) grant towards creative recovery in Mallacoota and surrounds.<sup>1</sup>

The grant amount was Au\$24, 938 and combined with *in-kind* and cash support from CHIRF, amounted to Au\$38, 845 of service value. This is a significant grant which has a one year delivery period: July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. The fund is augmented by donations of instruments and equipment by locals, in particular Strum Inc. who have also donated \$500.

Our Creative Recovery response had a simple idea at its heart: bringing people together through the sharing and making of art and story. We called it "Ashes to Music". All activities are free and access open to all.



### BeachUke @ Bastion Point, July 24th, 2020. Pam Bobbin and Padma Newsome

We have now spent \$3,130 and have committed to spend a further \$2000 towards Kindergarten music in collaboration with Cyndie Bignell, Kindergarten teacher, in the first half of 2021. We are currently developing the following programmes:

- Mandolin and Harmonica teaching in collaboration with local musician, Justin Brady.
- Easter workshop with saxophonist and educator, Martha Baartz.
- A return workshop with the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and Bill Hennessy.
- Restarting the Mallacoota Strum Club. Sundays @The Amphitheatre at 4pm.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://frrr.org.au>

From July 1 to December 19, the Ashes to Music programme had delivered 53 individual sessions, with 278 Units of Delivery,<sup>2</sup> including 21 Ukulele sessions with an average attendance of 6.8. To date, we have provided instruments to 15 people, and have offered the following sessions:

- BeachUke 12.00 Sat. @Bastion Point or @ the Golf Club
- ZoomUke 12.00 Sat.
- GardenUke 12.00 Sat. @ Jo's, Fiona's, and Frances'.
- BeachStrum 11.00 Sat. @Bastion Point
- BeachFiddle 4.00 Thurs @Bastion Point, the amphitheatre and @RM 7
- One on One and Family Teaching @Bastion Point, @Padma's or Zoom.
- Melbourne Chamber Orchestra and BeachFiddle Workshop @ the Golf Club Dec. 4th
- Genoa Carols. Dec. 12.
- Mallacoota Community Choir Tuesdays. @ Mallacoota P-12



**BeachFiddle @ Bastion Point 17th October, 2020**

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Unit of Delivery = 1 person attending a session.





**BeachUke @ Bastion Point July 24th, 2020**



**BeachFiddle@Bastion Point 17th October, 2020**





**The French Violin, Karbeethong Lodge, May 2019.**



**The French Violin December 30th. 2020**

## RESPONSE

Making and sharing music is very natural. It is cultural, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, visceral, and lovely. It forms relationships and networks, internal and external. It is a multimodal expressional platform.

But.... we were not making music in Mallacoota, a community in recovery from the effects of the 2019 NYE Firestorm and also from the extended long-term Covid19 isolation. The old routes were unavailable, places to meet inaccessible and social groups disrupted. It was very hard to reach out to others.

From January 2020, I began looking into historical Arts disaster responses and, with co-researcher Susannah Keebler, was able to develop an Arts Responder Check List.<sup>3</sup> This is a live document designed to act as a practical guide towards understanding nuance, support decision making in Arts disaster response circumstances. and provide action-based protocols for artists.

It has been a strong personal guide, aiding my decision making and giving me pause and temporal space to reflect before engaging with community in the Art space. The research had also shown that requests and ideas coming from others might help create an easier route forward: what I call "attending energies".

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.padmanewsome.com/arts-responder-check-list>

In June, Robin Bryant, CHIRF secretary, communicated to me an interest in starting a Ukulele group: teaching/sharing and music making. We decided to try *BeachUke @* Bastion Point. There were many positive components to this, which gave me reason to think it might succeed, including:

- Potential for innovation and adaptation.
- Potential for project bifurcation and mutation.
- Numbers would have critical mass: about 5 or 6 in Mallacoota.
- There was a strong committed group who were also health aware and attendees who to varying degrees understood the importance of the pilot project.
- Reclaiming Bastion Point as a people space was a lovely energy change, and after the fire the beach had become a family beach, a natural space for people to hang out. We joined this organic movement.
- The fire scars were to our back.
- Our view was expansive and natural.
- The air was fresh, and our activities were involved and fun.

The primary problems were adapting to ongoing CV19 changes, the weather, and the ability to hear properly. We bought a small PA to solve this latter problem, and we developed a strong set of CV19 working principles, adaptable to the changing ongoing regulations. As the year progressed, I would draw models and send them to Dr Sara Renwick-Lau, through Robin, for ratification. Without this connection, we wouldn't have been able to proceed.

Here is our first message about CV19, and the first design. (Robin Bryant, Facebook: 1/7/20)

*Hi all. This is the start of the Ashes to Music program funded by News Corp via the ever visionary FRRR Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal. Padma is the lead with the support of CHIRF. This is just a start whilst we swing into stride with a expanding program working towards revitalising the iconic Strum the very popular Lucy and Tony's style open mike and other elements to draw our lovely community together and cover all ages and skill levels and instruments. Please be patient as we develop it and you will see Padma is using all his connections to make sure we are safe.*

*Beach Uke Strum*

*Where: Bastion Point*

*When: 12.00 – 12.45. 4 July.*

*What: Uke Strum*

*What to bring: hat, chair or towel to sit on, Uke and tuners, strap etc. Wear warm clothes. Free and open to all.*

*We will start with beginner chords, strumming, and about 4 songs, which we can sing and play. I am always open to your repertoire, but need to put this through the filter of our learning curve. (First chords: C, a minor, F, and G.) also D minor.*

*Shortnin' Bread*

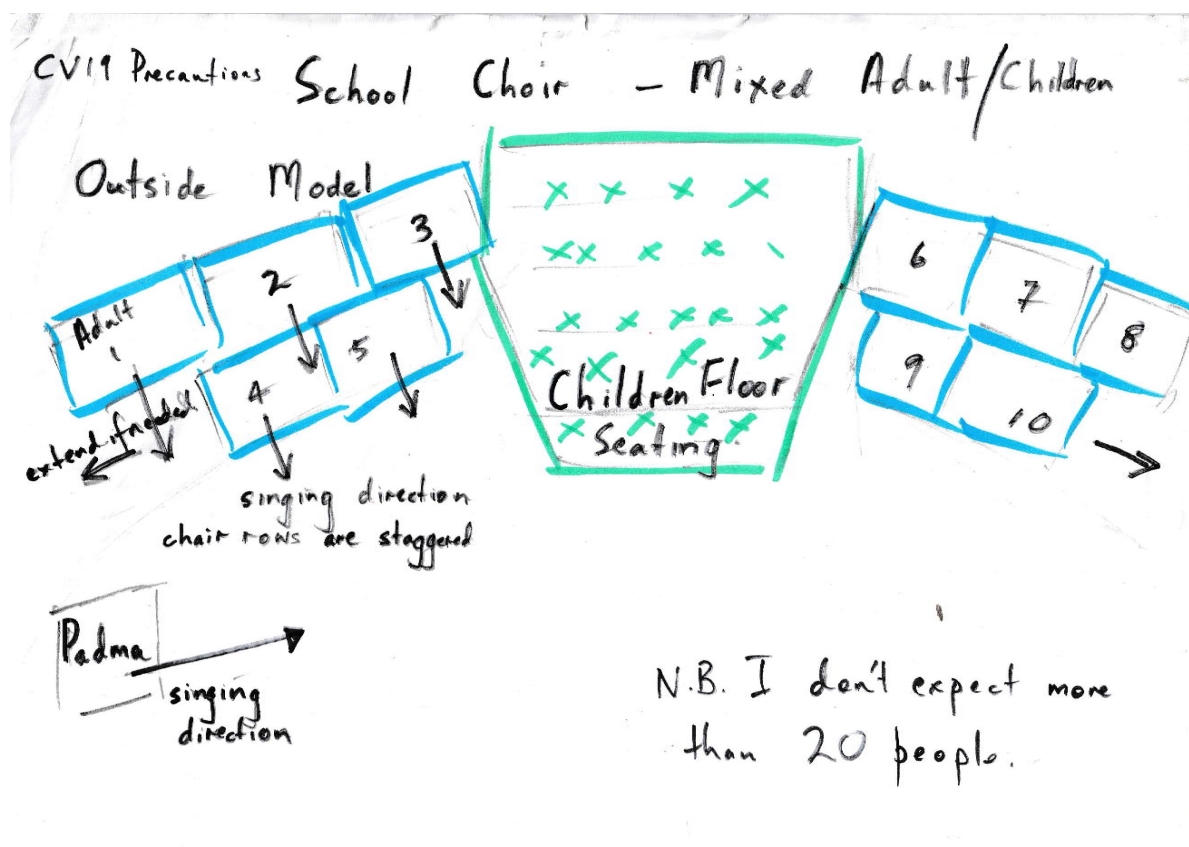
*Mad World*

*Now is the Hour*

*a few more.*







### Choir Design @Mallacoota P-12. Dec. 1st, 2020. Outside design.

Music sharing/making can be an acquired at any age above 3. The benefits of music and social music making are well known, are broad, long term, and immediate, so much so that it is often unnecessary to bring cognitive focus to trauma or recovery even though we are aware that every other person is suffering some sort of loss and discomfort associated with the fires. Brain flexibility is often associated with trauma and there is potential for accelerated learning. Further, there is significant research to suggest that music itself brings with it brain flexibility and stimulates new neural pathways out of atrophy.

There is already an innate overlay duty of care that exists and which all of us carry. This simply means that we seek comfortable ways to share, uncontested spaces to work, and are welcoming to all. My research suggests that trauma awareness or cognitive programmes towards recovery are not necessary as long as the creative platforms are essentially expressional, social, and have multiple entry points.

In addition, I have found the following factors important:

- Provision and expectation of regular sessions
- Freedom to attend or not
- Freedom to attend without expectation of skill acquisition
- Simple economic principles: in this case, no-one pays
- Ability to interact and have agency over the playing level, the material chosen, and the manner of the sessions.



THE LISTENING August 2020. (<https://vimeo.com/44760019>)

In celebration of our music sharing, and in collaboration with Kristen Rule, local Videographer and Ashes to Music participant, we produced and released a small film, entitled "The Listening". The song has lyrics by Trawlwoolway artist and colleague, Lisa Kennedy. In it she talks about the birds and listening to the land, and the importance of the birds returning, here referring to the Shearwater. We had just received a package of Stars of Hope, from ANZACATA, Oceania based Creative Arts Therapies body.

The Ashes to Music programme will continue with renewed vigour in 2021. I will begin my sessions from the 3rd week of January. My current foci are instrument replacement, expanding the sharing/teaching, rebooting the Mallacoota Strum Club, the Mallacoota Community Choir, Kindergarten, and I am seeking skill based teachers/sharers to join the project.



**BeachFiddle @Bastion Point. 2020**

*" Perhaps the most important formal protocol is to not take or move into or make and inhabit a creative space that might be inhabited by a local."* Padma Newsome. ARC List. 2020





**Padma Newsome** is an Australian composer, performer and recording artist. He is a Mallacoota resident and community artist. Padma is an auto-ethnographer and PhD candidate researcher at the ANU. His thesis title is: "Folding Over: A place-based case study of music creation and community art making practices in a regional rural setting, expanded to encompass the Mallacoota New Year's Eve Bushfire Disaster and Recovery and the 2020 CV19 Pandemic, Impact, Response and Recovery."

