

The Australian Songwriter

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Chairman's Message

Hey all, this month is a most exciting time in the ASA's yearly calendar. Of course it is judging time for our annual Australian Songwriting Contest, the 34th to be precise. There is always a lot of pleasure in handing over all the entries to our many music industry judges for marking. However, it entails a lot of work to get all the songs to them. From now until the end of the National Songwriting Awards Night, your Board will be extremely busy, toiling away to make sure everything goes just right. The 2014 Contest is the biggest yet, and I'm sure the Awards Night will be the same.

In the meantime, check out this month's Newsletter. Your Editor Alan Gilmour has done the ASA proud once again by bringing you a bulletin choc-full of interviews, stories and facts. It makes great reading, so please indulge.

Our 11 Regional Coordinators are all working hard at arranging Wax Lyricals in their respective 'neck of the woods', so if you want to perform contact them on their email addresses. They are a helpful lot, and will fit you in somehow.

See you at the said Wax Lyricals.

Cheers,

Denny Burgess

Editor's Message

Welcome to the August 2014 edition of The Australian Songwriter. While the ASA team is busy judging the 2014 Australian Songwriting Contest, we have had just enough time to put out another edition of the magazine.

This edition features interviews and articles on 2013 winners, RoyMackonkey, Nick Charles, Alex Tobin and Neil Devereaux, and ASA members Lynn Hazelwood, Casey Marie Wilkinson and Vanessa Craven. We also managed to catch up with legendary Australian guitarist, Kevin Borich for a chat. Thanks also to James Linderman for contributing another one of his always-interesting articles.

The Australian Songwriter welcomes written contributions from ASA members and readers of the magazine. If you have anything that you would like to say about yourself, other songwriters/musicians/artists/new releases or upcoming events, simply send your contribution via email to the Editor at alang@asai.org.au.

Cheers,

Alan Gilmour

ASA Member Profile: Vanessa Craven

The talented and eclectic Vanessa Craven comes from Daylesford in Central Victoria. She was born and brought up in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains, in a Hill Station called Mussoorie, in India.

Vanessa commenced playing guitar in her early teens in India. She lived in Mussoorie, which is a hill station, situated in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. She came to Australia in 1977 and since then, has studied Theology, and later worked as a librarian. However, music beckoned, and she now plays music in a variety of settings, including restaurants, bars, festivals and age care facilities.

She lives in Daylesford VIC and finds the area conducive to playing music and being creative in general.

She was instrumental in putting together the inaugural Daylesford Spring Folk Blues Fest, held on 18 September 2010, and the second festival, held on 13 October 2012.

She also runs an Open Mic. on the third Friday of each month at the Daylesford Senior Citizens Hall and encourages musical potential in those who attend the sessions.

Vanessa comes from a Welsh/Indian background and is a folk musician at heart, playing a unique mix of folk, blues and country. Her music reflects her diverse heritage and musical influences.

She is a multi-instrumentalist and plays the Cajon drum, floor tambourine, harmonica and guitar. She currently plays mainly in Open G, Open D, as well as standard tunings. She also surprises listeners by throwing in a touch of didgeridoo in order to add atmosphere and colour to her music.

Her influences in music have been Bob Dylan, Donovan, Peter Paul & Mary, The Seekers, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Randy Stonehill, Keith Green, Larry Norman, Second Chapter of Acts, Eric Bogle, Janis Ian, Bob Brozman, Harry Manx, Pete Fidler, Ry Cooder, Nick Charles, Liz Frencham, Kristina Olsen, Del Rey, Kate Campbell, Glen Cardier, Sugarcane Collins and more.

Vanessa's debut album, "Filtered Light", has recently been released, and features the backing of the band, Lunar Dust. The band comprises Vanessa on vocals, guitar, lap slide, harmonica, didgeridoo and Cajun drum, George Condos on Latin guitar and udu, Don Gula on double bass and guitar, Andrew Barcham on banjo and Paul Jonas on violin.

ASA: Has your music been affected by the sights and sounds that you heard while living in India? Is there any Indian influence in your music?

Vanessa: No, my music thus far has no Indian influence in it other than some of the ideas for some of the songs I have written. I was born and brought up in India in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains, 10,000 ft. above sea level. I grew up in an environment where my family life, schooling and university education were more 'western' than Indian. This was largely to do with India being under British rule for so many years, and though I grew up in a period after The Raj, and India was free from British domination – the British system of schooling still prevailed. It was a good system. My Father ran an Anglo-Indian co-ed high school and my Mother was also a teacher. My music developed out of singing hymns and playing guitar at Church and getting together a team of school friends, whom I used to teach new songs to from the 'Songs of Praise' modern hymns and songs, and we would harmonise our tunes. One new song a month for Church. It was an inter-denominational church – closely akin to a Baptist Church. I used to also listen to 'Radio Ceylon' as it was called then, to the 'Listener's Choice', which happened to be on air around 7.00 pm during the week, when I had to do my 'home work'. I would switch on the radio and listen to my favourite artists – in those days Cliff Richard, The Beatles, Hank Williams, Jim Reeves, Bob Dylan, Peter Paul and Mary, Nancy Sinatra, Donovan, Tom Jones, Englebert Humperdinck, Elvis Presley and more...I grew up with a lot of Indian music around me, but was not drawn to it at all. Although before I left India, around the time when the Beatles came to India and Rishikesh to find peace and their inner selves and stayed with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, I began to turn my sights on Indian music, and got myself a sitar.

Mainly because George Harrison took it up and started incorporating it into his music: "My Sweet Lord" and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" to name a few tunes. However, I had to head off to University and so never got to take my sitar with me. Instead the guitar was in tow, and at University which was a Methodist run University – there was more church music and choir music and opportunities to play in Festivals with my Uni Group of singers. After coming to Australia, western music 34

has still been the main influence in my life. However, this is in the process of being addressed, because somewhere within myself there is a yearning to turn back to my Indian roots, and incorporate Indian music and make it mine. To this effect about 2 years ago I bought a Chaturangui – an Indian guitar with 23 strings. It was developed in 1978 by an Indian musician who is well known – and Debashish Bhattacharya his protégé is now a master of the instrument. It can be tuned to any open tuning (Open D, G etc), and produces wonderful harmonics and resonances with the sympathetic strings. It is played like one would play a 'lap steel' guitar.

I have been working on this new instrument and a few new tunes are on their way, with a definite Indian flavour to them. I have also been influenced by Harry Manx and Bob Brozman - and their keenness to embrace 'eastern' sounds in their music. There is no escaping this time round, and I am enjoying incorporating 'eastern' sounds in my music, which so far has not been evident in my music.

ASA: You seem to have a preference for folk instruments. Why did you choose these types of acoustic instruments for your music?

Vanessa: Yes, the guitar being such a portable instrument was something my Dad and Mum got for my 12th birthday. I was never at home unless I had a guitar in my hand. The harmonica arose out of listening to my Tibetan friends at school pick up and play the harmonica. I thought if they could do it so easily, so could I. Then of course Bob Dylan and Donovan with their harmonicas gave me the challenge to play both guitar and harmonica together. I wasn't able to land a harmonica rack in India, but I improvised by tying the harmonica to the branch of a tree at mouth level and play it this way.

Since coming to Australia, I went to various folk festivals and saw artists playing Cajon drum. Then, at Port Fairy, Mark Apsland, who founded Woodskin, was selling his Cajon drums. This was just what I needed to provide my own percussion while playing guitar and harmonica. The didge came along later, a few years ago, while I was still at work. I had to have an operation on both my feet and while I was recuperating, and unable to get about, I decided to teach myself to play the didge, after tips from various didge players. O, the joy of it when I finally got the hang of circular breathing!! The didge has a wonderful way of making me feel part of being a new Australian. Its earthy drone helps me relax, and actually does wonders to the diaphragm and assists my singing voice. I use it in some of my songs and enjoy playing guitar, Cajon drum and didge together. I play it in public if there is no one