



Not the Programme Notes

*Being sundry items of interest about our upcoming productions and the arts in general
October 2009*

The Ugly Duckling Plus...

When you attend Valley Artists' end of year production (it's already in your diary, isn't it? – Laguna Hall, October 30,31, November 1, 5, 6 & 7) you will be treated to not one, but two plays by A. A. Milne. And a barbershop quartet.



As well as *The Ugly Duckling*, some of our younger performers will present *King Hilary and the Beggarman*, in which King Hilary's Chancellor learns that pride does indeed go before a fall. Like many of Milne's works it has a moral – two in fact. The first is "*Whatever Fortune Brings, Don't be afraid of doing things.*" The second you will have to learn for yourself – I don't want to spoil the ending.

Milne's characters, whether they be a corpulent bear, a misanthropic donkey, a timid little pig, a king or whatever, often speak with an appealing humour that is at least as attractive to adults as it is to children.

In my library I have books with titles like *The Tao of Pooh*, *The Te of Piglet* and *The Pooh Corner Cook Book*. All of these, of course, are inspired by the most popular works of A. A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*.

The plays to be presented by Valley Artists include no bears, donkeys, piglets or even ducklings. They do include kings, queens, princes, princesses, impostors, shortsighted public servants, and a strangely clad mendicant.

One of my books, *The Pooh Perplex* describes itself as a student casebook "*In Which It Is Discovered that the True Meaning of the Pooh Stories is Not as Simple as is Usually Believed, But for Proper Elucidation Requires the Combined Efforts of Several Academicians of Various Critical Persuasions.*" Remarks which apply equally to Milne's poems and plays.

Which is really to say that no matter what your age is, or your intellectual pretensions are, this will be an evening of great entertainment, and whether you learn something important about life or simply have a good laugh, it's something not to be missed.

Arriverderci Ross

For many years Ross Fletcher has been a staunch supporter of the arts in Wollombi, and of Valley Artists in particular.

Ross played many roles in our various productions over the years - all memorable. Perhaps his finest performance was in the Wollombi Weekly World Discovery Tour, when we were all treated to another, darker side of this fine performer - in this case, the back side.

Ross left us earlier this month to travel to Italy, looking to find inspiration and to improve his technique as a sculptor, and we all wish him well.

In keeping with our policy of encouraging our local artists, Valley Artists made a contribution towards the cost of his air fare.



Bronwyn Duncan reports on the...



2009 Wollombi Valley Short Film Festival

Now in its 11th year, the 2009 Wollombi Valley Short Film Festival began and ended with laughs. As we've come to expect, the warm up film (*produced by Wojt Kowaluk*) starring our inimitable MC Bob Philippe was amusing, original and clever. The challenge Bob faces to make it in time to open the festival just gets tougher each year. This year, having departed this life in mysterious circumstances, he was obliged to find his way back to 'Heaven on earth' via St Peter and God Himself. Needless to say, the goal was attained and the show did indeed go on.

Fifteen films were shown in competition this year, chosen from around 30 submissions. Although films can be up to 10 minutes in length, none was more than 8 minutes long and most were 5 minutes or under. The winning and runner up films and third prizewinner were all 4 minutes long. While length in itself is not an indicator of quality, it's clear that much can be achieved on screen in a very short time.

Judges Michael Noyce, Wendy Squires and David Brown chose "Mankind is No Island" as the winning film and "Return" as runner-up. By the same film makers, Jason van Genderen and Shane Emmett, both showed what can be achieved with a clear story idea, relatively low-tech execution, and precise editing. "Mankind is No Island" was shot using mobile phone camera, without voice over or dialogue. Both of their films told powerful, moving and resonant stories. "Mankind is No Island" has already achieved major success, and was the winner at the 2008 Tropfest NY festival. These two film makers also generously donated the second prize, worth \$750, back to Valley Artists to support and encourage the continuity of the Festival especially for young film makers.

Third prize went to Damien Slevin for his intriguing animated film, "A Break in the Monotony". This film took three years in the making.

"The Man from Snowy River", a skilfully edited film by Tania Hardin, and from the prowess of the riders from Wollombi Valley Pony Club, married tense action with a great sense of fun throughout its highly entertaining 5 minutes, and won The People's Choice Award, which is kindly donated by Tim Williams from Laguna Wine Bar. The voice over reading of the classic Banjo Paterson poem was beautifully executed by Summer Bolton.

Each year a film made by students from Laguna School is shown at the start of the night, out of competition. This year's piece, "I'm Really Sorry", a humorous take on class discipline, again gave several students a chance to practise writing, film making and performance skills.

It might have been a sense of recognition that had the audience laughing at the final film, "On the Move", a documentary from Dungog Film Group. It captured with comic touches the high dudgeon gripping a small rural community over the (re)location of a longstanding but slightly off-centre monument in the heart of the town. Couldn't happen here, could it?

All the films engaged us in some way, and generated a buzz by the end of the night. Many made us laugh or feel sad. Others provoked us to ponder, question, or see things differently. The wide range of subjects, styles and genres, the humour (whether silly or bizarre), mystery, parody, tragedy, action and intrigue – all played their part.

Congratulations to producer Janine Oliver, Monterosa Media, RC Sound, and the whole team of volunteers behind this year's Festival for the excellent organisation, technical prowess and warm welcome. And thanks to all the sponsors for helping to make it possible. The fact that a big crowd turned up on a cold rainy night says a lot about the Festival's reputation as a 'must see' annual arts event. Looking forward to 2010.

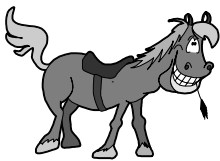
And the winner is...

Our last quiz question was: Englishmen, including Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, do it with a feather, a custom which has, in more recent times, spread to include a few Australians – but definitely not to Americans. However, the Swedish think it's silly to use a feather, and use a more technologically advanced method. What is it?

The answer is signing the register of distinguished scientists of the Royal Academy, which, following tradition, is always done with a quill pen. Before signing, members are required to attend a practice session, so they won't blot the book, but many succeed in blotting it anyway. The Swedish Academy uses a biro or some such, and Americans can not be admitted to the Royal Academy, which is for scientists who are British or at least members of the British Commonwealth.

We had no correct answers, so I drank the prize myself.

Perhaps, this being a rural area, and very fond of horses, generally speaking, a suitable quiz question should be on a horsey theme - so here goes:



Harry, a local horse breeder, was most concerned when birds started nesting in his favourite mare's mane. He tried everything, but nothing would make those birds leave.

In desperation, Harry turned to old Oz, who'd lived in the district for many years, and had a reputation for effective, though sometimes crude, remedies for livestock – one of the old school.

"Well," said Oz, "What you have to do is simple – just rub yeast into the horse's mane."

Harry didn't think that would work, but having nothing to lose he followed the instructions Oz had given him.

Of course it worked. Why?

The first correct entry to info@valleyartists.org wins a suitable prize. In the event of there being no correct entry, the editor will consume it himself.

Winnie the Swan?

Did you know that Winnie the Pooh might have ended up being a swan? A.A. Milne wrote *When We Were Very Young* two years before *Winnie the Pooh*. In the introduction he tells of his son Christopher Robin feeding swans in the morning, one of whom he named Pooh.

"This is a very fine name for a swan," Milne writes, "because, if you call him and he doesn't come (which is a thing swans are good at), then you can pretend that you were just saying 'Pooh!' to show how little you wanted him."



Country Fair

The inaugural Wollombi Valley Country Fair will be held on the weekend of November 7-8. The theme, appropriately, is *Taste the History*.



Plenty of stalls, selling local produce, wine tasting, chocolate, arts and crafts; an open day at the museum, with demonstrations of pioneering methods post and rail fence construction, making a water trough with an axe, making a square post and cutting timber slabs; woodchopping at the tavern; a lantern parade; street theatre and the official opening of Sculpture in the Vineyards.

Unfortunately there's a clash with Valley Artists' production of *Ugly Duckling* – the 7th is our closing night. Closing nights are always sold out, so plan to catch the *Duckling* on another night, and take advantage of the Country Fair to enjoy an unforgettable weekend in Wollombi.

By the way, my use of the word inaugural is very deliberate. It means "marking the beginning of an institution". It should be the first of many, and has a lot to offer for the future of this valley.