

Dotted across regional New South Wales, there are seventeen conservatoriums providing a diverse range of music education options for people in local communities from Albury to Young.

# Conservatoriums

## More than meets the ear

by STEPHEN O'CONNELL

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Mitchell Conservatorium's Hip Hop Program presents workshops in public high schools in Lithgow, Bathurst and Forbes. The next round will be held with Bathurst based Desert Pea Media in Feb 2008. Website [www.mitchellconservatorium.edu.au](http://www.mitchellconservatorium.edu.au)

In a program unique to this state, and one which maintains close links with schools, the cons are funded by the Department of Education and Training to provide the necessary leadership, resources and expertise to deliver accessible, high quality, life-long music learning for people living outside the major metropolitan centres. It's a massive undertaking. Together the regional conservatoriums employ over 560 musicians, conductors and music teachers and deliver music lessons to over 17,000 students.

Music education comes in many forms. Generally speaking, and for the most part, the cons are funded to provide one-to-one instrumental tuition for musical instruments in schools, and on-site — it's one of the most important ways to provide equitable access to music education for people living on farms or a long way from town.

The other is to provide the opportunity to perform. Currently the regional conservatoriums have over 2,500 students participating in more than 250 ensembles across the state. These include everything from symphony orchestras to recorder quartets ... and everything else in between: string orchestras, big bands, concert bands, chamber music groups of all shapes and sizes and smaller groups such as clarinet, flute and brass ensembles. Tamworth Conservatorium has an innovative orchestral program, including the excellent Tamworth Regional Youth Orchestra. Orange Regional Conservatorium's highly regarded symphony orchestra not only performs classic orchestral music but was also recently used as the orchestra for the local production of *Cats*. Mitchell Conservatorium has a high profile, flagship chamber music program and a number of jazz ensembles as well as affiliated community ensembles, including choirs, bands and orchestras which encourage the community to become involved in music through performance. In Goulburn, there is an outstanding jazz program featuring the Big Jazz Band which has recorded a CD and toured to appreciative

### December

21 December

Narrabri Mardi Gras **NARRABRI**  
Tel 02 6779 6760.

21 December — 27 January

*The Calleen Collection*, works of art acquired between 1977 and 2007 through the Calleen Acquisition Award. **COWRA**  
Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6340 2190  
Website [www.cowraartgallery.com.au](http://www.cowraartgallery.com.au)

21 December — 3 February

*The Archibald Prize* for portraiture, one of Australia's oldest and best-known visual arts awards, in Broken Hill for the summer. Toured by MGnsw. **BROKEN HILL**  
Regional Art Gallery Tel 08 8088 6897  
[www.brokenhill.net.au/bhart/main.html](http://www.brokenhill.net.au/bhart/main.html)

22 December

Summer Solstice at the Australian Standing Stones. Join in this seasonal celebration at either sunrise at 6am or sunset at 6.30pm, with food and entertainment. **GLENN INNES** Tel 02 6730 2400.

audiences at jazz and blues festivals, as well as playing regularly in Goulburn and the Southern Highlands. All the regional conservatorium ensembles regularly play in concerts for their local communities.

Many regional conservatoriums also run music camps, present pedagogy conferences, and in some instances, are registered training organisations teaching courses up to advanced diploma level. All regularly have students achieving at associate diploma level on instruments as diverse as the piano through to orchestral percussion.

But it doesn't stop there.

Regional cons also provide other services for their communities such as music therapy, HSC support, professional development for local teachers and, in many cases, the delivery of entire music education programs for schools. Some of the most exciting initiatives involve the very youngest people in our communities through early childhood music programs, such as Wollongong Conservatorium's remarkable program which has over 700 students and has been the benchmark for this type of education in Australia. An excellent program introduced in 2007 across the regional conservatoriums was 'Schools' Music Week' offering a week long festival of concerts and workshops for all local school children in June. The program was first pioneered at Goulburn in 2004 and this year in Goulburn alone over 2,200 children benefited from the program, which is presented in association with the Sydney Youth Orchestra and Sydney Jazz group, The Vampires.

Mitchell Conservatorium was recently awarded Regional Arts Fund support for its community outreach Hip Hop Program targeting youth at risk and Indigenous youth. It offers workshops in public high schools by a local DJ, lyric coach Tory Roth and the Bathurst based

Desert Pea Media group, with the best group from each school having the opportunity to perform with at the Newtons Playground Festival in March 2008.

The conservatoriums also have the benefit of providing major venues for their respective towns, catering not only for their own programs, but also to touring groups. Their existence both encourages and provides professional performance opportunities for their staff and supports state funded performance initiatives. The NSW Regional Presenters network is a joint initiative between the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums and Arts NSW which has brought major touring organisations such as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Youth Orchestra and ensembles from Musica Viva to many regional NSW towns. And it's not just classical. Jazz and rock groups also regularly tour the cons. For example, Mitchell Conservatorium's jazz and world music visiting artists program embraces a diverse and eclectic variety of genres, with tours by Arabesk, Trio Apoplectic, Mr Fibby, Nick Parnell, the Vampires, Amber Hammond, Mark Walton, Jim McNeely and others planned for 2008. Without the valuable infrastructure provided by these wonderful institutions, touring possibilities in NSW in general would no doubt be greatly reduced.

The regional conservatoriums in New South Wales have become education powerhouses that provide innovative and exciting programs delivered by talented and dedicated staff for the benefit of the whole community. The cons are making a real difference for music performance and education in regional NSW. ■

**Stephen O'Connell is President of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums. He also serves on the Arts NSW Music Committee and is the President of Southern Tablelands Arts and a Director of Regional Arts NSW.**



*The first regional conservatorium in NSW was the Central Western Music Centre, established in 1978 in Bathurst and Orange. It's now known as the Mitchell Conservatorium, in Bathurst. Over the years since then more conservatoriums have joined the fray, in Albury, Coffs Harbour, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Gosford, Goulburn, Grafton, Gunnedah, Lismore, Muswellbrook, Orange, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, Young and, most recently, Armidale.*

*Left: Tamworth Regional Youth Orchestra*

## December – January

22 December – 17 February

👁 *Unsafe Passage: Emma Wise* An installation exhibition of interactive sculptures inspired by the artist's relationship to the sea. Western Plains Cultural Centre, **DUBBO** Tel 02 6801 4444

26 – 31 December

🎵 62nd Australian Jazz Convention at four **GOULBURN** Clubs Tel 1800 353 646

29 December – 1 January

🎪 Peats Ridge Festival. Featuring only the finest local, national and international acts across 15 stages including a large Indigenous lineup. **PEATS RIDGE** Festival will ensure your ears are treated to the very best. Website [www.peatsridgefestival.com.au](http://www.peatsridgefestival.com.au)

3 – 6 January

🎪 Forbes Jazz Festival Contact Lester D'Ombra **FORBES** Tel 0429 796 589