



Dandenong Ranges Music Council inc.



Bells of Peace Anzac Centenary Commemoration Project.

The Dandenong Ranges Music Council developed the Bell of Peace project with the communities in the electorates of Casey and Latrobe in Victoria to tell their stories of the impact of WWI in local communities.

Community conversations began in 2013 with schools, historical societies, choirs, musicians, artists, service clubs and RSL clubs. The story which underpinned the conversations was about Dame Nellie Melba, who lived at Coldstream. Nellie answered the phone call which announced the signing of the armistice in 1918.

History tells us that Nellie summoned her chauffeur and raced down to Lilydale and rang the local fire bell. It was 9pm, and the communities across the Dandenong Ranges and the Yarra Valley lit their hurricane lamps, rang school bells, fire station bells and church bells. They saddled up the horses and congregated in the Main Street of Lilydale to celebrate together. Across the hills many villages rang their bells to pass on the news of the longed for peace, as no one had telephones for communication.

Children's week came in October 2013 and the Dandenong Ranges Music Council borrowed sets of the Federation Bells to explore how children might enjoy the experience and how feasible it might be for the Bells Of Peace ANZAC project to include the Federation Bells. Children from preschools to grade six congregated at Monbulk Primary School Arts Centre for a series of workshops delivered by Carolyn McAlister. The children enjoyed the experience and it was then decided that the community and songwriter John Shortis would tell Nellie's story using the federation hand bells.

An artistic team was engaged including John Shortis and Moya Simpson from Canberra. John was Artistic Director and Moya was Narrator/Singer. Brian Hogg, Composer and Music Director from Lilydale was commissioned to write a new work for children's voices, adult voices and concert band. Brian visited schools and community music groups, choirs and bands to discover the stories from a local perspective. The end result is a stunning three movement work with tubular bells featured carrying the bells theme in a symphonic context.

Meanwhile, John was also visiting community music groups, sporting clubs, community gatherings and theatre companies collecting masses of stories with personal experiences of how the war really impacted on the women and families left behind in Australia.

It became evident to the artistic team that a new song for voices and bells would be a wonderful way to express Nellie's story and engage the entire cast of 450. This was not envisaged in the original artistic brief as a formal piece of music with text. John Shortis visited five schools and various community music groups and late in the project a new piece emerged which was to include all singers, concert band, and bell ringers ranging from five to 86 years old.

This meant more sets of bells scattered across the Dandenong Ranges at Upwey High School, Tecoma, Mt Evelyn and Monbulk Primary Schools. A new song by the people with Federation Hand bells for voice and concert band written by the local children with John Shortis.

Bells Of Peace



Bells are chiming, are chiming,
Chiming through the hills
In the distance, the distance
Chiming through the hills
Through the hills
Through the hills
Through the hills

Bells are a-ringing
(Bells of Peace singing bells)
Bells are a-ringing
(Bells of Peace singing bells)
Bells are a-ringing
(Bells of Peace singing bells)
Bells are a-ringing
(Spread the word around)

Soldiers marching, a-marching
Soldiers marching home
In the distance, the distance
Slowly marching home
marching home, marching home
marching home, marching home..... Bells area ringing etc.

There was such enthusiasm for participating in the bell playing that John used every note from

the chromatic scale except B. Brian Hogg also used notes from the F major chord on Federation Bells in his composition in the movement representing the soldiers returning to the Dandenong Ranges.

An Education Tool Kit and DVD of the Bells of Peace performance has been produced, complete with music and text, photographs of the visual art exhibition produced by schools, RSL and historical societies.

It would be fair to say to say that the Federation Hand Bells provided a unique musical experience to the communities of the Yarra Ranges to listen, learn and to perform in a historical performance to commemorate the centenary of ANZAC.

At a cast gathering on October 14, 2015 there was much interest in revisiting the music of the Bells Of Peace project in 2018. One incredible idea is to have the Federation Bells play the Bells of Peace theme all around the State, Country and World using a similar format as the enormously successful "Music Count Us In" presented by Music Australia.

Article by Beverley McAlister OAM Treasurer DRMC Board

DVD and Education Toolkit can be obtained by contacting karen@drmc.org.au

