

TO COONAMBLE, GULARGAMBONE, QUAMBONE, WALGETT, Lightning Ridge, Moree, Inverell, Glen Innes, Bingara, Narrabri, Barrabra, and Murrurundi we went, on an eleven day extravaganza with four musicians, one photographer and a choir of thirty . From 17 to 25 September, The Leichardt Espresso Chorus performed eleven concerts and conducted eleven workshops; met and sang with four other community choirs and over 400 kids; and formed diverse 'Song in the Key of Bloke' choirs and audience choirs along the way!

It was a fabulous opportunity to work with local musicians, artists and presenters using a model that allowed full community participation, and the opportunity for concert profits to go directly back into the presenter groups projects of choice. In essence – self seeding, sustainable regional arts, designed to thrive, not just survive.

From **Leichardt** to **Lightning Ridge** by MICHELLE LEONARD

So how did it work? Our repertoire for the tour was almost all Australian. Most of it was commissioned and arranged by the Chorus over the last three years to give children and adults the opportunity to sing with us in concert.

'Songs in the Key of Bloke' male choirs were formed from scratch the night before public concerts (usually with the assistance of a little 'alkihol' – white spirits – it's amazing what a beer or two will do to bring the country singers in!) Audience choirs were formed on the spot in a pre-concert rehearsal until they were participating; and childrens choirs were formed after music was sent to schools and rehearsals were done on the day before the evening concert. Adult community choirs operated the same way before they joined us on stage.

With the miracle of PowerPoint and a data projector we had images from the communities showing during the performances and soundscapes with bells and whirlyies at the start of every concert.

Participating choirs included the Coonamble Singers, Inverell Male Choir, Glen Innes Arts Council Choir, Narrabri Chorale and Barrapella (from Barraba). Choirs formed especially for the project included the Coonamble Children's choir, Lightning Ridge Central School Choir and the Narrabri Children's Choir, as well as 'Songs in the Key of Bloke' ensembles along the way.

December

15 December – 4 January

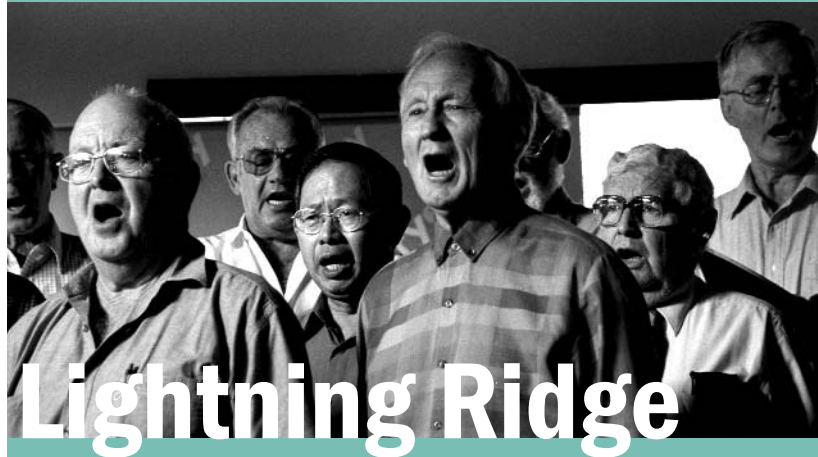
👁 Northern Rivers Urban Design Awards at the **LISMORE** Regional Gallery
Tel 02 6622 2209
Email artagallery@lismore.nsw.gov.au

15 December – 12 January

👁 *Affordable Arts* Christmas Show at the Roxy Gallery, **KYOGLE**
Tel 02 6632 3518 Email ruth.tsitimbinis@kyogle.nsw.gov.au

So what did I learn, other than never to underestimate your audience?

1. Make every concert special. Don't settle for second best. Children are capable of more than we realise.
2. Never assume the fax, music, message *etc.*, has been received. Check and check again, and then ring!
3. Over the life of a project contacts will change. Be prepared for this!



4. Allow presenters to decide concert times and venues. They know best.
5. Food and accommodation providers want to do the best job possible for you – Let them.
6. Australian choral music can and should be innovative, inspirational and *NEW*. Your audience and singers will get a thrill out of singing it, if you let them.
7. Bring your own piano! (Electric, of course).
8. Understand that for some people the internet is an optional extra.
9. Make sure you have a very understanding partner who will pay your ridiculously huge phone bills
10. Attempt this type of logistical challenge with a toddler only with *EXTREME* caution. Most of the people you will be dealing with will be volunteers, however, and therefore women, so they will usually understand! ■

Originally from Coonamble, Michelle Leonard is the founder and Artistic Director of Sydney's Leichardt Espresso Chorus. She is also the founder the annual Moorambilla Festival for singers of all ages, which will be celebrating its fourth year in 2006 with a series of concerts in Coonamble's beautiful art deco buildings.

The Inverell Male Choir had them crying out for more when they performed with the Chorus on 21 September. Photo: Georgie Lampe

Post-Script: The Coonamble Crooners is now a 'work in progress' as a direct result of the tour, with a 'threat' to move to Bourke and beyond ...



15 December – 19 January

👁 *Nihonga Paintings* Work by Paul Nolan in the Nihonga Style of Japanese Painting. **GOSFORD** Regional Gallery
Website www.gosfordregionalgallery.com

15 December – 5 February

👁 *It's a Wrap & Curious Kids #2*
Two exhibitions at the Curious Art Gallery, **CHINDERAH BAY** Tel 02 6676 0818
Website www.curiousart.org.au/index.html