

FOR FIVE DAYS IN FEBRUARY, THE ARCADES, CHURCHES AND school halls of Armidale overflowed with the strains of beautiful music as the inaugural New England Bach Festival took over the city. Over 1500 music lovers of all ages flocked to hear innovative, historically informed and professional performances of JS Bach's unforgettable works in twelve different venues. The sell out crowds have assured the Festival will be a permanent fixture on the calendar and confirmed Armidale's identity as a centre of music and culture.

Why does the music of JS Bach continue to woo even non-classical music lovers? The Festival was the brainchild of well-known organist, harpsichordist, choral conductor and recognised scholar in early music, Dr Terry Norman, who extends a challenge to those who think they may not be interested in classical music: "In my experience when people come into contact with a fine performance of Bach's music, even those who do not normally attend classical music concerts are invariably moved." He appears to be right. Festival venues were full of audiences smiling – and

excellent concerts venues, heritage buildings, fine coffee shops and restaurants and the University of New England. It is also located in a beautiful highland landscape surrounded by national parks and waterfalls.

A particular coup for the first New England Bach Festival was the acceptance of Gustav Leonhardt to be Festival patron. Leonhardt, 75, organist, harpsichordist, conductor and scholar, is probably the most respected interpreter of J S Bach's music in the world.

The festival featured a superb selection of musical events including a Chaconna, (17th Century dance) by harpsichord, violin and cello performed in Armidale's largest cathedral; a woodwind expose; the Coffee Cantata – a dramatic operetta performed in Hannah's Arcade and even an event for primary school children – a birthday party for Bach (who would have been turning 318). The body of Bach's work is enormous and varied enough to organise a full annual festival every year for the next 20 years.

In the raptures of a genius

by CATH OVENDEN



Top: Terry Norman, Festival Director
Right: Violinist Lucinda Moon performing the Chaconna in the cathedral on opening night.
Bottom: Operetta in Hannah's Arcade.
Photos: Cinch Photography

Terry Norman said plans were already underway for next year's Festival. "Judging by the popularity of this first Festival, it may be possible within a couple of years for the New England Bach Festival to be of national and international significance. It's quite possible for us to build a Festival of international stature and Armidale is the ideal host for such an event. Next year we will be having the Song Company, which is a real coup as well as John O'Donnell from Melbourne who is probably the best organ harpsichordist in the country and also a scholar of baroque music." International players will also be invited to perform at next year's Festival. ■

even weeping — over the richness of the music on offer. Perhaps the common notion that JS Bach was a genius is true. (Apparently a reporter once asked Albert Einstein, "What is it like to have the greatest intellect in the universe?" and Einstein replied, "I don't know, you would have to ask JS Bach.")

Armidale — the Third City of the Arts — has a lively arts industry. It is home to the New England Regional Art Museum, numerous



The New England Bach Festival was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, the NSW Ministry for the Arts, the German Consulate General, Armidale Dumaresq Council and numerous local businesses.

The Festival also had the support of New England Regional Art Museum and the Musicological Society of Australia, as well as the churches in the city of Armidale.



March

28 March - 11 May

👁️ *Gelam Nguzu Kazi - Gugong My Son*, lino prints from Western Torres Strait Islands. Also *Crude Aquearistics* - Charlie Trivers, installation and photos using over 100 cost cast recycled tyre fishbottles from the Murrumbidgee. **WAGGA WAGGA** Art Gallery Tel 02 6926 9660

29 March

👁️ **CROOKWELL** Country Fair and Parade, with the Lieder Youth Theatre stilt walkers, and stalls, bands, bull riding series and indfarm tours. For further information contact Lieder Theatre Company Tel 02 4821 5066 Website www.crookwell.gov.nsw.au

29 March

👁️ 'The Great Dunny Classic' Bush Poetry Festival performance. Learn to perform and write bush poetry with Australia's Champion Poet, Milton Taylor *plus* other events. **DUNEDOO**. Contact Sue Stoddart Co-Ordinator Tel 02 6375 1975 Email dddgroup@bigpond.com

29 - 30 March

👁️ Yass Show and Rodeo, rural show with full ring programme and rodeo. Supported by the **YASS** Show Society, Yass Showground. Contact Lesley Cox Tel 02 6226 1615