



**HIGHER
GROUND
AUSTRALIA**

<http://www.hgavic.com>

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HIGHER GROUND NEWSLETTER – May 2025

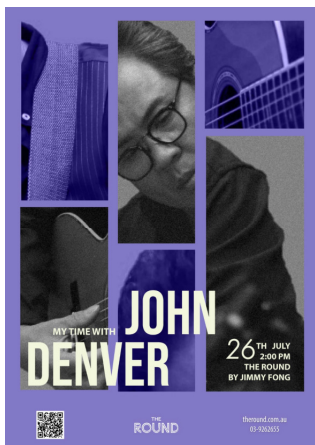
WELCOME

I honestly do not think I could get slacker than this! Although I know that you are probably not waiting for the newsletter to arrive with bated breath, let me assure you that I always have good intentions, but somehow things get in the way, like travelling, grandkids, and other stuff! I am not going to promise that the newsletters will be any more regular, but I can promise that I shall pack into each one, as much John Denver news as I can.

Welcome to 2025 and your first newsletter of the year.

MY TIME WITH JOHN DENVER – JIMMY FONG

For anyone who has had the pleasure of listening to Jimmy Fong telling his story through the songs of John



Denver, they would tell you not to miss his new show that is coming up on July 26.

Jimmy Fong's story of how he taught himself to play the guitar and sing in English by listening to radio programs transmitted from the RAAF base in Butterworth, Malaysia and how it led him on a path that would

eventually cross with that of John Denver is a story well worth listening to.

Jimmy's inimitable way of expressing his love of his music and the sharing of stories with his audience is an unforgettable experience. Don't miss his forthcoming concert.

Jimmy will be performing his 'My Time with John Denver' show on 26 July 2025 at 2:00 PM at the Round, 379-399 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading Victoria.

Tickets are available from

<https://www.theround.com.au/whats-on/my-time-with-john-denver>

GHOSTS OF ASPENS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

It's Autumn here in Australia and whilst the view out of my front window is bleak today with grey rain-filled

clouds and a breeze that is sharp enough to slice me in half, it is nonetheless colourful as the yellow and red clothes of the crepe myrtle and the crisp brown leaves of the London plane trees cling to the boughs before they too have to succumb to the inevitable. I probably mostly relate John Denver to Autumn since the annual gatherings in Aspen are held in the northern Fall season when Colorado is especially beautiful. Everyone has their own Introduction to their John Denver story, and I would like to share mine with you.

As preparations are being made (by others) of my 50-year school reunion that will occur next year in 2026, I am reminded of the school friend who, in around 1975, introduced me to the music of John Denver through a pile of cassettes that belonged to her father. James Coleman, a local artist of some note painted whilst John sang in the background. The first time I met him in his studio that smelt of turpentine and oil paint and pipe tobacco smoke, he spoke eloquently of a man whose music had obviously had an effect. He quoted lyrics from songs and told us, a rapt audience of three teenagers of how those words touched him personally. I didn't know that he was terminally ill at



that time. James Coleman died in 1976, just a year after I last met him. But some encounters are never really forgotten, are they? I eventually lost contact with his daughter and the third

teenager of the time has since died. If my friend attends the reunion next year, I am sure we will have much to catch up on.

In 2007, almost thirty years after that encounter, and a lot of John Denver stuff in between, I arrived in Aspen for the first time with a group of friends to attend the 10th anniversary of John's death. I returned four more times and, as I explored the area further, those lyrics that I had listened to over the decades became more and more meaningful. Country Roads, Sunshine on my Shoulders, Back Home Again, The Mountain Song, Rocky Mountain High, Annie's Song and others surrounded me in the physical landscape of Colorado, and it was easy to see why Aspen, its mountains, and its wilderness, was John's sacred place and inspiration for many of his lyrics.

Mountain songlines and rustling breezes formed the words that became the songs we love to listen to and that we never get sick of hearing.

For me, travelling along the highways with friends, staying with my late friend Pat, exploring the wonderful things that 'colourful' Colorado has to offer, singing and laughing, being surrounded by mountains and staring with awe at the magnificent sights, have become an important part of my own life story.

But I am not alone in having an Aspen story (or two) to share. Here is a story from Carolyn Wilkey of her visit to Aspen. She says that the feeling she got when she attended Aspen in October the first time is still in her heart.

'I love the Tribute and reading the updates.

Twenty-seven years ago is a very long time, but it feels like yesterday when we attended. John's loving fans were there that year talking with one another. It was very hard on his loyal fans missing him so much. It was more of a disbelief.

Although we have not attended the event for many years, I still keep in touch with people we met while there. To my amazement, I found we picked up where we left off as friends. I really don't think anything for us has changed. We still miss John and his wonderful music the same as we did that early October when we celebrated his life.

The first night, still weary travelers, the people held up lit candles in honor of John. There was a sense of peace. I remember being alone with my daughter in Windstar breathing in the fresh air and placing a rose on a pond in John's memory. We watched it for a long time before leaving. I recall horses grazing in the field in the distance. There was an elk herd crossing the land that afternoon. It was a special day.

The beautiful memories of the Rocky Mountains, new friends, meeting and sitting with John's family at the concert, and his wonderful band members are unforgettable.

The first night we watched from our hotel in awe the snow fall on the main street in Aspen. The snow fell as soft as John's song Aspenglow.

Thank you, Janette for keeping John's memory alive.

Love, Carolyn Wilkey'

It is almost time for me to return to Aspen. Almost. Not this year nor next. I think that by the time 2027 comes around, I would probably be ready to take a road trip to Colorado for the 30th anniversary to enjoy the music of the mountains, to catch up with some familiar faces, to explore the amazing landscape, and to perhaps check to see whether Kevin Costner is still hanging around...

HIGHER GROUND AUSTRALIA

Whilst we have not organised any formal gatherings lately, our circle of members remains strong, and we keep in regular touch with each other. I shall be returning to the site of our third gathering in Warburton later in the year to attend an event, so I'll check out our tree whilst I am there.

Newcastle, the place where the majority of our members live, has been inundated with flood water recently, and although our friends are all safe and dry, many others are not. Jason Owen, a singer and sometimes John Denver tribute artist will be hosting a flood-relief concert in Newcastle in June.

<https://newcastleweekly.com.au/x-factor-star-jason-owen-to-host-flood-relief-concert-in-newcastle/>

Whilst most of the country, including our arid areas in Northern Territory and Western Australia are under water, spare a thought for the farmers in western Victoria, who are in severe drought. The state government still will not acknowledge the current drought disaster, so few state funds are being directed towards our farming folk. We appear to be living in the middle of a Dorothea Mackellar poem.

I love a sunburnt country,

A land of sweeping plains,

Of ragged mountain ranges,

Of drought and flooding rains,

Spare a thought for the volunteers and residents who are fighting floods and the farmers, their lands parched and who are trying to beat drought conditions. These are Australia's true heroes.

Website: www.hgavic.com

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Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/highergroundaustralia>

LOS ANGELES FIRES 2025

This year's LA fires, fanned by destructive Santa Ana winds, devastated parts of Los Angeles. Pacific Palisades and Malibu burned for over three weeks before they were contained and whole areas were completely razed. Among those who lost their home in the Palisades fire was Cassandra and Jesse Belle. Fortunately, they were not at home when the fires broke out, but the loss of a lifetime of memories is devastating. We are very sorry to hear of their loss and send healing thoughts their way as they face the huge challenges ahead.

ASPEN IN OCTOBER 2024

Last year, due to the sale and reconstruction of the Mountain Chalet in Aspen and an offer too good to refuse from the Mountain Chalet in Snowmass, AIO decamped to Snowmass and from all accounts, it was a very successful gathering. Of course, everyone had to get used to the different setting, including some



parking issues, but the welcoming party from Mountain Chalet, the reunion of friends, and the introduction to new visitors made 2024 very special. Many of the musicians presented their shows at the Mountain Chalet, and Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon held their large concert elsewhere as the Wheeler was being refurbished again, it was a very happy time for all.

Four young men on spring break from their university in Alabama joined the 2024 AIO and participated in the evening singalongs. With a promise to return, tragedy struck just outside of Denver when the car in which they were travelling was involved in a fatal accident. Avery Martin passed away, Ben Shappard was critically injured, and Lloyd Stenglein and Bradley Cole suffered minor injuries. Ben is recovering from his injuries slowly. The families have been in regular contact with members of the Aspen in October Facebook group with updates especially of Ben's progress. Whilst this is a terribly sad end to a successful gathering, it is a stark reminder that each day is a bonus to be lived in the best possible way.

It is heartening to know that John's music has impacted upon more than just us old fogeys, and that younger people are embracing and wanting to connect with the music we hold dear in our hearts, even when it is screamed out on the dance floor during the last set at an Irish wedding. It really is...

ASPEN IN OCTOBER 2025

AIO will be held in Snowmass again this year. In fact, I have a suspicion that it will be held permanently at the Mountain Chalet in Snowmass going forward.

I believe that the Mountain Chalet is completely booked for the AIO event from 1 – 6 October 2025 and that the entire Mountain Chalet has been booked by AIO guests. There are other venues nearby, including Stonebridge Inn, Pokolodi Lodge, and more. Checking in the Aspen in October Facebook page will also provide you with the list of events for you to prebook.

Mack Bailey and Chris Nole will be presenting their ***Spirit: The Music of John Denver*** at the Wheeler Opera House in Aspen on Friday 3 October 2025 at 7:30 PM, and Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon will be presenting ***An Evening of the Music of John Denver*** at the Wheeler Opera House on Saturday 4 October 2025 at 7:30 PM. Tickets are selling fast and are available from <https://aspenshowtix.com/>.

Events are already being planned for the AIO week in October. You can pre-plan your week by checking the list of events on the Aspen in October Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1705313536543973>

Unfortunately, Facebook does this weird thing with dates and times, showing them in my local time, so I would suggest you check out the site yourself and

decide what you want to do. I certainly do not want to give you dates and times 17 hours ahead of the scheduled Aspen time.

Aspen, Snowmass and the surrounding areas are especially beautiful in October, and if the weather is fine, find some time to explore.

JOHN DENVER TRIBUTES IN AUSTRALIA 2025

Jimmy Fong will be performing his *My Time with John Denver* concert on Saturday 26 July 2025 at 2:00 PM at the Round, 379-399 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading Victoria.

Tickets are available from

<https://www.theround.com.au/whats-on/my-time-with-john-denver>

Darren Coggan has a number of John Denver tribute concerts coming up this year as follows:

Sunday, 27 July 2025

The Arts Centre, Cootamundra NSW at 3:00 PM

Sunday, 17 August 2025

Coutts Crossing Coronation Hall, Coutts Crossing NSW at 3:00 PM

Sunday, 24 August 2025

Tallagandra Hill Winery, Gundaroo NSW at 6:00 PM

Saturday, 20 September 2025

Shoalhaven Entertainment Centre, Nowra NSW at 7:30 PM (John Denver & Glen Campbell show)

For tickets or more information, click the link below.

<https://www.darrencoggan.com/gig-guide/>

VALE DAVID MALLET (1951 – 2024)

One of my very favourite songs (as many would attest) is The Garden Song, which was written by David Mallett and recorded by The Muppets and by John.

David Mallett died on 17 December 2024 and although he may not have been very well-known outside of the folk circles, he was John recorded some of his songs, including The Garden Song, The Ballad of St Anne's Reel, and You Say the Battle is Over.

Anni Clark of Maine said, 'David Mallett's music contained messages aimed at making the world a better place, urging people to slow down...to see, hear, taste, embrace and share the simple and good things in life.'

FROM THE ARCHIVES

'SOME DAYS ARE DIAMONDS – ONE MAN'S JOURNEY THROUGH AUSTRALIAN ENTERTAINMENT' BY MAX MOORE

New Holland Publishers P/L 2003. Pages 11-14.

Here is an excerpt from the memoir of our much loved late friend, Max Moore.



...But I was trying to enjoy life as a retired man in 1997. Although my job involved constant travel and had already taken me around the world so many times, globetrotting was what my wife, Meryl, and I decided to do. You see, travelling as a couple was a fairly new experience for us, because, while I was out gallivanting with some of the biggest names in the industry, Meryl remained the foundation of our family life, raising our children and knocking me off my high horse if ever the constant dealings with superstars caused me to lose focus on the really important things in life. I couldn't have done it without her.

With time on my hands and our children now adults, we embarked on a world tour and, after a trip to the United States, found ourselves in London on 12th October 1997.

That day is still etched in my mind, but not for the reasons I had wished. It was a somewhat grey and misty morning which, I suppose for England, was really nothing out of the ordinary. We had decided to move on to Scotland and so, after breakfast, I headed up to London's King's Cross station to book our travel. Walking up the stairs of the Underground, surrounded by the usual swarm of people racing to work and absorbed in thinking about the day before them, I remember feeling how lucky I was that I had never been part of this rat race. There were no alarm clocks startling me out of my slumber at the same time every day, and there was no regular daily routine. In my work I was constantly rushing around from crisis to crisis. There were many late nights and yes, some alarm clocks. But rather than knowing what lay ahead, I used to wake up and wonder what the day would bring.

And here I was, in a city that I loved, looking back with pride at the journey I had taken in life and looking forward to – well, at the time, looking forward to Scotland.

As I mounted the last step, my ears caught the usual Cockney aria of the paper boys, a sound that always added to the excitement of London for me. Mind you, I'd never really listened to any headline they were crying out. But, on this particular morning, I stopped in my tracks as a familiar word or two caught my ear. I walked just a bit faster so I could read the street banners – and then I saw it.

JOHN DENVER KILLED IN AIR CRASH

I must have said something or made some sort of sound, because now people on the street were staring at me. Maybe I'd turned pale as I stood there, thunderstruck, not quite taking in the words. But once I got over the initial shock, I thought that someone was just playing a sick joke on me. Yes, that was it: a joke.

Only a few weeks before, John had been in Sydney for the taping of a 'This is Your Life' tribute to Kevin Jacobsen. Our whole neighbourhood had gone into a frenzy when John Denver rode his motorcycle down our driveway. He'd just dropped by to chat, which was a lovely surprise, as we were planning on having dinner with him that night anyway.

Looking at the banner headline, I remembered that night, when John, Meryl and I had dinner with Col Joye, Lee Kernaghan, Kevin Jacobsen and their wives. At a nearby table, a couple were celebrating the wife's birthday and at first, they had no idea who was at our table. When the birthday cake arrived, the husband started to sing 'Happy Birthday' quite timidly. Suddenly, John was singing along with him and Lee and Col soon joined in too. The lady burst into tears when she realised that she was being serenaded by three music legends.

When I jolted back to reality, I must have been on auto-pilot as the paper boy took my money. Scotland had completely vanished from my mind, and I turned to go back down the stairs into the station, refusing to read anything in the article, but staring at the headline over and over again, looking for the words to disappear. I needed to get back to our hotel, back to Meryl, back to a safe place where, together, we could take it all in.

I found Meryl slumped on the edge of the bed, looking quite distressed as she said, 'Roger (a London friend of ours) just rang. He said that John had been killed. But I don't want to believe him, Max. Mistakes like this happen all the time, don't they?' What could I say? What could I do? I walked over to her and held the newspaper up. Then I sat beside her on the bed – and we cried and cried. We spent the next two days in our room in tears.

While I was accompanying John on one of his Australian tours, he'd turned to me during dinner and said, 'Max, you've had such a great life. You were there at the very beginning of rock 'n' roll in Australia. You have so many stories to tell. I think you should write a book about your experiences.' I laughed at the suggestion, but he went on, 'You've helped create history, Max. All those wonderful stories you tell me – they need to be told to the rest of the world. Just think of it as documenting a momentous time in Australia's history.'

I sat quietly for a minute and thought about what he had said and the enormity of the job. I'd never done anything like that before and I didn't feel comfortable with the idea. It seemed like bragging. But John, who had the great gift of intuition, must have felt my reluctance and, after about ten seconds silence, he looked me straight in the eye and spoke in that wonderfully gentle, wise voice of his. 'And Max, I would be deeply honoured to write the foreword.'



'Okay,' I said. Deep breath. 'I'll do it.'

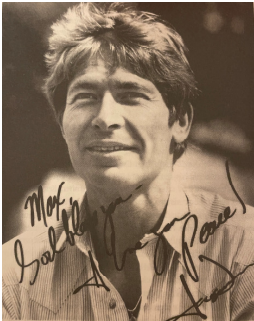
But there are always family matters that crop up, days go by, grandchildren arrive, gardens are crying out to be cared for. It's the old story. You never quite get around to doing the things that are dancing at the back of your mind.

But all that changed on 12th October 1997 which, for Meryl and me, was the day the music died. Now I knew I had to do it, because John wanted me to, and he would have been so proud that I had.

And so, my dear friend John Denver, instead of you honouring me and my life by writing the foreword, I am acknowledging your life and loyal friendship by writing this prologue in honour of you.

With deepest love and respect,

Max Moore.



AFTERWORD

We met Max in 2004 when he came to our John Denver weekend in Boonah, Queensland. He quickly made himself our most important member, and he participated in each of our annual gatherings. He travelled Aspen in 2007 via Canada and New England, and it was beautiful to see him catching up with people he had not met since John had toured Australia.

Max passed away at the age of 89 on 26 December 2011. He was a true storyteller and a much loved member of Higher Ground Australia (still is in spirit). He was also a much-loved member of the Australian entertainment industry, many of whom were introduced to us and them in turn, regaled us with stories of Max and John that were never written down. Here is an excerpt from the summary of our John Denver weekend in October 2013.

We had dedicated this weekend to our good friend Max Moore, who at the age of 88, organised our 2011 gathering near his home town of Bowral, NSW. Max had died in December 2011, and this weekend was dedicated to celebrating his life and his long lasting friendship with John Denver. Max was not just a manager to John, but was a firm friend, and John would often 'slip' into Australia and stay with Max and his wife in their family home.

Our silent auction also included many personal articles that were donated by Max's family, and that had a

'John Denver' theme, like the home video Max took whilst staying in Aspen at John's house in 1996. We raised well over \$1,000 from the silent auction, which was donated to Peggy McDonald's raptor rehabilitation centre, as a contribution and acknowledgement of her good work.

Sunday is our traditional 'tree-planting' and 'letter-reading' time. It is a solemn beginning of the day as we read out the letters from Aspen and Monterey prior to planting a tree for John and laying a commemorative plaque in front of the tree.

We went to the spot that we had planned to plant the trees and found that unfortunately, it was not a satisfactory location for the native trees we had intended to plant. A quick phone call was made to Peggy, who readily agreed to allow us to plant the trees on her property, and so we quickly packed up, and in convoy, sped off to her property. As we walked toward the bushland near the edge of the property, , Peggy indicated a small clearing that would be perfect for the tree planting. Between two 'guardian' trees, knobbly and ancient, John, Colin, and Alistair set about digging the holes for the two trees. The first was a dedication to Max, our friend and John's tour manager. The second was the tree dedicated to John. They were both sprinkled with water we brought from our respective homes in bottles. We placed the plaques on an angle, so that they were slightly facing each other.

Our weekend was almost over. We had one small 'job' to do before we had to wend our way to our various homes. Saying goodbye to Peggy, and with an enormous bunch of 'stolen' fresh flowers from the garden of our weekend accommodation, we stopped at the Bowral cemetery to pay our respects to our dear friend Max.



TRIBUTE ARTISTS

Check out your favourite tribute artists.

CATHY GIANFALA CARRIERE

<http://www.cathygianfalacarriere.com/>

MARK CORMICAN

<http://markcormican.com/>

JIM CURRY

<https://jimcurrymusic.com/>

BACK HOME AGAIN

A tribute to John Denver.

<https://johndenvertribute.net/>

CHRIS COLLINS AND BOULDER CANYON

Please check the Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon website for their concert schedule and other information.

<https://www.johndenvertributeband.com/>

CHRIS WESTFALL

<http://www.chriswestfall.com/inConcert.php>

JOHN ADAMS

<HTTPS://WWW.JOHNADAMSBAND.COM/>

CHRIS BANNISTER

<https://chrisbannistermusic.com/>

BRAD FITCH

<http://www.cowboybrad.com>

WILL KRUGER

<http://www.willkruger.com>

RICK SCHULER

<http://www.sunshinerick.com>

TED VIGIL

<http://www.tedvigil.com>

For more information about tribute artists around the globe, check out our website; www.hgavic.com

Some material included in this newsletter has been derived from the public domain, such as the internet and printed media. Articles and reviews are the opinion of the individual writer and as long as the content is of a reasonable nature and it is appropriate, it will be included. Organisations mentioned or featured in this newsletter are included to educate and inform people of their role and purpose. HGA does not profit from including the names of any organisation in this newsletter.

This newsletter is only emailed to those people who have individually contacted HGA and expressed a wish to receive it. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you no longer wish to receive the HGA newsletter.



The Mountain Song

(Tracey Wickland)

*I came here from the city
A thousand miles away.
I came just for a little while
You know I never meant to stay.
I meant to take my pleasure
Have a good time and be gone.
But I fell in love with a lady
Now I sing a mountain song.*

*I listened to the music
Of the night wind in the pines
I saw the quiet splendour
Of a field of columbine.
I skied on crystal pathways
To a mountain peak so tall
And I walked the mighty summits
With the one who made it all*

*And I fell in love with a lady
'Cause I've seen her at her best
And I've walked her wild and rugged paths
Through her open wilderness
And now I never can betray her
Steal her riches and be gone
'Cause when you love a mountain lady
You gotta sing a mountain song*

*Now people come from everywhere
To see what they can find.
And some take lots of pictures,
And some just take their time.
But they're some who take her beauty
That can't be bought or sold
And they think of only money
While destroying wealth untold.*

*But you fall in love with a lady
When you've slept upon her breast
And you've walked her wild and rugged paths
To her open wilderness
And you never can betray her,
Steal her riches and be gone.
'Cause when you love a mountain lady
You gotta sing a mountain song*

The Peace Poem

(John Denver)

For peace around the world...

'If peace is our vision, let us begin.'

*There's a name for war and killing
There's a name for giving in
When you know another answer
For me the name is sin
But there's still time to turn around
And make all hatred cease
And give another name to living
And we could call it peace*

*And peace would be the road we walk
Each step along the way
And peace would be the way we work
And peace the way we play
And in all we see that's different
And in all the things we know
Peace would be the way we look
And peace the way we grow*

*There's a name for separation
There's a name for first and last
When it's all for us or nothing
For me the name is past
But there's still time to turn around
And make all hatred cease
And give a name to all the future
And we could call it peace*

*And if peace is what we pray for
And peace is what we give
Then peace will be the way we are
And peace the way we live
Yes, there still is the time to turn around
And make all hatred cease
And give another name to living
And we can call it peace*