

**HIGHER
GROUND
AUSTRALIA**

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HIGHER GROUND NEWSLETTER – September 2020

WELCOME

It's been a long time between newsletters. We've had a challenging year and globally, we have been on the same rollercoaster and our experiences are largely shared. We are facing probably the most challenging global event in our lifetime and the fact that the COVID virus is such an unknown quantity that it has made it almost impossible to predict its course and our responses to protect the vulnerable. It has been a catastrophic event from every perspective, resulting in many, many deaths, particularly of the elderly and infirm across the world.

On January 26, 1988, John Denver was in Australia to help us celebrate our Bicentenary, for which John wrote the song, Sing Australia. This wonderful song sums up Australia's history in a succinct and poetic way. In fact, along with our National Anthem and the Seeker's classic, 'I am Australian', Sing Australia is one of the most patriotic songs in Australia's songbook. Interestingly, and perhaps prophetically, there are two lines, which today are the most significant.

*'And if we stand divided, divided we will fall
But if we stand together, we shall conquer all'*

Australia, our great nation is currently divided; separated by borders, which day after day are becoming as impenetrable as the one that divided Berlin. Families separated by distance unable to receive medical attention or to attend the funeral of a loved one. State leaders sneering at people like me, who live in Melbourne, Victoria, where we are treated like lepers because of a severe but avoidable outbreak, which has cost us the lives of over 700 elderly people. We are now a divided nation because of flaws in our constitution; one that was written as recently as 1901.

Melburnians have been in strict stage 4 lockdown since July 8. For 74 days, we have been restricted to our homes for 23 hours per day (relaxed to 22 hours last week) and we have a strict curfew, the first time in our 232-year history.

Despite the draconian restrictions, I consider myself one of the lucky ones, as I have the time to catch up on world news, so I have an idea of what the media is reporting on your part of the world, and I have plenty of music to listen to and projects to complete. Not everyone copes with isolation in the same way, and many are struggling. These are the people we need to

reach out to and to unite with through social media, emails, phone calls, etc. WhatsApp is an excellent and free service for calling your overseas friends. It helps to talk to people.

I know of a few people taking the trip to Aspen this year. I'm not sure about this year's schedule, or if indeed there is one. But I envy you. Just a little. I should have been in Aspen myself for a short time this year until my October 2 flight was cancelled. Masks are mandatory in Aspen. Please read the information on this website before you go.

https://www.cityofaspen.com/1315/Mask-Information?fbclid=IwAR1Poea4TtoxTMoK6CaNbAZmLCATzDi522RZBFHARCfAN_fmFOaT9WWom6w

And check out the Aspen in October Facebook Events page for up-to-date information.

<https://www.facebook.com/search/events/?q=aspen%20in%20October>

I'll be back there as soon as I can and I honestly believe that one day we will stand together as one and we'll conquer, not only this virus, but much more that ails our sad planet.

GRAMMY-WINNING SONGWRITER JOHN PRINE DIES AT 73 OF CORONAVIRUS COMPLICATIONS

Wednesday, 8 April, 2020 (Reuters)

Grammy-winning singer John Prine, who wrote his early songs in his head while delivering mail and went on to become one of the most influential songwriters of his generation, has died due to complications from coronavirus.

Prine's publicist confirmed the singer-songwriter died due to complications from COVID-19 at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre, Nashville.

Prine was hospitalised on March 26 suffering from symptoms of COVID-19, according to his wife, Fiona Whelan Prine, who was also his manager.

"We join the world in mourning the passing of revered country and folk singer/songwriter John Prine," the Recording Academy, which gives out the Grammy Awards, said in a written statement.

"Widely lauded as one of the most influential songwriters of his generation, John's impact will continue to inspire musicians for years to come. We send our deepest condolences to his loved ones."

Early songs written walking the streets of Chicago

Born in Chicago on October 10, 1946, Prine's older brother taught him to play guitar at the age of 14.

After graduating from high school in suburban Maywood, Illinois, Prine worked as a mail carrier for five years, performing in Chicago clubs in the evenings at occasional "open mic" nights.

He would say later that some of his best-known early songs were written while he walked the streets of Chicago delivering mail.

"I likened the mail route to being in a library without any books," he told the Chicago Tribune in a 2010 interview.

"You just had time to be quiet and think, and that's where I would come up with a lot of songs. If the song was any good I could remember it later and write it down."

He was drafted into the US Army in 1966, and was stationed in Germany during the Vietnam War, before returning home to dedicate himself to music and establishing himself as a leading member of Chicago's folk revival scene.

Singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson fatefully saw Prine performing at the Earl of Old Town club, leading to Prine's signing with Atlantic Records and self-titled debut album, released in 1971.

That album, widely praised by critics, contained several songs that would become staples of Prine's catalogue.

They included Angel from Montgomery, about a woman wishing for deliverance from her unfulfilling life, Paradise, about a Kentucky town devastated by strip mining, and Sam Stone, chronicling the downward spiral of a drug-addicted Vietnam War veteran and containing the oft-quoted refrain:

"There's a hole in daddy's arm where all the money goes, Jesus Christ died for nothin' I suppose."

The songs have since been covered dozens of times by other artists.

Songwriting style compared to Bob Dylan

His early songwriting style earned comparisons with folk great Bob Dylan, who later called Prine one of his favourites.

"Prine's stuff is pure Proustian existentialism. Midwestern mindtrips to the nth degree. And he writes beautiful songs," Dylan told the Huffington Post in 2009.

Prine released a string of albums in the 1970s, winning larger audiences and critical acclaim as his music stretched from folk to country to Americana, often infused with a sense of humour.

In the 1980s, fed up with the recording industry, he started his own label, Oh Boy Records, releasing

albums under that imprint for the next several decades.

He won his first Grammy Award in 1991, Best Contemporary Folk Album, for *The Missing Years*.

He would win a second Grammy in the same category in 2005 for *Fair and Square*. In December 2019, the Recording Academy honoured him with a lifetime achievement award.

Prine survived squamous cell cancer in 1998, undergoing surgery to his neck and tongue that left his voice with an even deeper, gravelly tone.

In 2013, he was diagnosed with cancer in his left lung and had it removed.

Prine was able to find humour in his struggle with cancer, joking that it actually improved his voice. The same humour suffused much of his work, alongside its poignant commentary about the struggles and foibles of ordinary people.

"If I can make myself laugh about something I should be crying about, that's pretty good," he once said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-08/country-folk-singer-john-prine-dies-at-73-of-coronavirus-compli/12132638>

HGA TRIBUTE – SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE

Despite our restrictions in 2020, we may start thinking of a time when we are able to meet informally in the year ahead. Victorians may live in a 'corona-colony' at the moment, but we look forward to the time we can come together as a small group and celebrate our corona-survival with a sprinkling of John's music thrown in. The web address is

<https://www.hgavic.com/>. Please contact me on hga.vic@gmail.com with your photos, comments, and feedback.

HIGHER GROUND RAPTORS

Coronavirus may have stopped the world in its tracks, but our natural world still needs help. Peggy McDonald's work with rehabilitating raptors doesn't stop because of the Coronavirus.

If you have any spare change, please donate to this worthy cause through Peggy's website. All monies raised through donation and fundraisers is used for special projects. Check out Peggy's website also to see the photos of the recent upgrade to the circular aviary, which is used for the rehabilitation of birds prior to their release back into the wild.

www.highergroundraptors.com and <https://www.facebook.com/HigherGroundRaptors>.

Click the link to view an older story on Peggy and her work, which was aired on the ABC.

<https://www.abc.net.au/7.30/caring-for-injured-birds-of-prey/11290932?jwsourc=em>



MONUMENTS AUSTRALIA

I didn't realise that the good people of Boonah, Queensland have included one of our planted trees for John to the Monuments Australia registry. Boonah – you rock!

<https://www.monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/people/foreigners/display/90596-john-denver>

FROM THE ARCHIVES

From the Newcastle Herald, NSW

JOHN DENVER, WHO DIED 20 YEARS AGO, LEFT A BIG MARK ON A CARDIFF MAN

October 11, 2017 – Damon Cronshaw

Cardiff's Paul Stocker has long loved the music of John Denver.

"He's been a comfort to me through hard times," Paul, 78, said. "I just love his music and lyrics. I'm not talking about the songs that everybody knows. I'm talking about the songs that hardly anybody knows."

To mark the 20th anniversary of Denver's death, which falls on Thursday, Paul told us a story about the time he met the famous singer at a Sydney hotel in 1983.

"I knew he was in Australia, but I didn't know where he was staying," Paul said. "I said to my family, as soon as I heard he was in Australia, 'I'm going to meet John Denver, I'm absolutely certain of that'."

Paul drove to Sydney Airport to drop his daughter off for a flight. He, his wife and two sons then drove back to The Rocks in the city. Paul's family wasn't too keen to participate in his mission to find John Denver.

"I said, 'I want to walk down through the Regent Hotel. I think that's where I'm going to meet John Denver'." Paul had a hunch that the singer was staying there. "When we got to the Regent, the doorman recognised us as 'hicks from the sticks'. He was smiley and friendly. He gave me a big bow and I bowed back to him. We walked into the foyer and I was absolutely awestruck. I'd never been in a space like that before in my life."

At this point, Paul had a thought about walking up to the front desk, asking if Denver was staying there and declaring that he'd like to meet him.

"It was pretty naive stuff," Paul said. "We were standing there like stunned plovers." The family headed for the door. We went through the process again of the doorman bowing to me and me bowing to him. Then I went to walk through the door and I ran smack bang into John Denver. He was standing there smiling at the doorman and me."

Paul said Denver's smile "made it easy to say giddyay".

"I said 'giddyay, you're the man I need to see'."

"He said 'really'."

They had a chat and Paul introduced him to his wife and two sons.

"He asked us where we were from and we told him we had tickets to his concert." Paul was mindful of not taking up too much of the star's time. "I thought I better not push my luck here, he's been absolutely charming."

As the family left the hotel, there was a stunned silence. Eventually one of my sons broke the silence, saying 'far out'."

For those who don't know, "far out" was Denver's signature saying. So what about this hunch that Paul had about Denver staying at the Regent Hotel? Paul attributed it to "the power of positive thinking". "I was absolutely determined to meet him. I said to my children and my wife, 'I know I'm going to meet him when we're down here in Sydney, I don't know how it will be, but I know I'm going to meet him'."

"That's how it happened." Paul will always remember his meeting with Denver. "He was very pleasant. He spoke to us in a way that you could only dream of. He not only used our names, including the boys, but he remembered them during the course of the conversation. He was what I wanted him to be. I'd been comforted by his music for a big part of my life. His concerts were near unbelievable."

This included, we hear, his two gigs at Newcastle Entertainment Centre.

TRIBUTE ARTISTS

Check out your favourite tribute artists. Although everyone is hibernating at the moment, check out their pages to when they are next (hopefully) performing:

MARK CORMICAN

<http://markcormican.com/schedule/>

JIM CURRY

<https://www.jimcurrymusic.com/future-concerts/>

BACK HOME AGAIN

A tribute to John Denver.

Tom Becker is a former member of the Legendary Folk Group, The New Christy Minstrels, and has gone on to appear with Grammy Winners and Music Legends including Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis, Willie Nelson, Gregg Allman and Jerry Jeff Walker.

<http://www.johndenvertribute.net/schedule.htm>

CHRIS COLLINS AND BOULDER CANYON

<https://bouldercanyonband.com/concert-schedule>

CHRIS WESTFALL

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

JOHN ADAMS

[HTTPS://WWW.JOHNADAMSBAND.COM/CALENDAR](https://www.johnadamsband.com/calendar)

CHRIS BANNISTER

<http://chrisbannisterthemusicofjohndenver.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>

JOHN DENVER PROJECT BAND

<http://johndenverprojectband.it>

RON MATTHEWS

<http://www.ronmathews.net>

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

ASPEN IN OCTOBER 2020

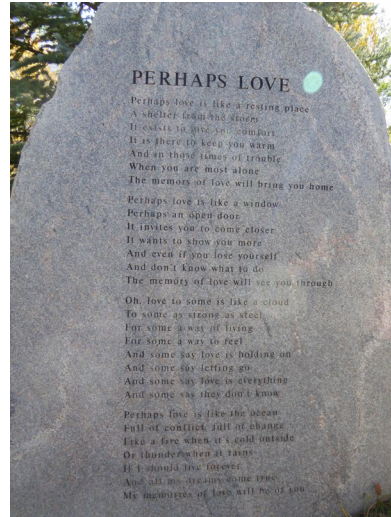
I've not heard about any formal performances taking place in Aspen this October, although I do know many people are still making the pilgrimage to Aspen.

Despite this, there is much to do in Aspen during October's typically beautiful weather and it is a good opportunity for people who are spending some time there to hike, to wander, and to reflect on John's music in such a unique and beautiful setting. It is probably a good time to remember many of our friends who are no longer with us, and with whom we shared beers, laughter, stories and songs. We'll miss Aspen this year, but we would also welcome photos from those who will be visiting.

Aspen is a mask-covering zone and more information about the specific rules surrounding the area can be found on this website.

https://www.cityofaspen.com/1315/Mask-Information?fbclid=IwAR1Poea4TtoxTMoK6CaNbAZmLCATzDi522RZBFHARCFAN_fmFOaT9WWom6w

Safe travels and safe travelling.



CALYPSO

In these often-depressing days of COVID lockdowns and restrictions, I've chosen the song I find to be the most joyful of all of John's songs. I cannot wait for the opportunity to sail on the ocean (a tinny in a creek would suffice) and feel the wind in my hair. I cannot wait for the day I can safely step off a plane, jump into a hire-car and drive across a country with no border restrictions. My 'Calypso' is the thing or the place that brings me the most joy. Stay safe everyone, and until we can meet again, take care and keep listening to John Denver.....

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.

Calypso

(John Denver)

*To sail on a dream on a crystal-clear ocean
To ride on the crest of a wild raging storm
To work in the service of life and the living
In search of the answers to questions unknown*

*To be part of the movement and part of the growing
Part of beginning to understand
Aye, Calypso, the places you've been to
The things that you've taught us, the stories you tell*

*Aye, Calypso, I sing to your spirit
The men who have served you so long and so well*

*Like the dolphin who guides you, you bring us beside you
To light up the darkness and show us the way
For though we are strangers in your silent world
To live on the land, we must learn from the sea*

*To be true as the tide and free as the wind swell
Joyful and loving in letting it be*

*Aye, Calypso, the places you've been to
The things that you've shown us, the stories you tell*

*Aye, Calypso, I sing to your spirit
The men who have served you so long and so well*

*Aye, Calypso, the places you've been to
The things that you've shown us, the stories you tell*

*Aye, Calypso, I sing to your spirit
The men who have served you so long and so well*

