Community music, place and belonging in the Bega Valley, NSW, Australia

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Community Music, Place and Belonging in the Bega Valley, NSW, Australia

Andrea Gordon

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Master’s of Research degree in the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research, University of Wollongong.
The information in this thesis is entirely the results of investigations conducted by the author, unless otherwise acknowledged, and has not been submitted in part, or otherwise, for any other degree or qualification.

Signed

Date
Executive Summary

The uncertain future of country towns in Australia has triggered wide-ranging discussions of their social, environmental and economic sustainability. Another, ‘fourth pillar’ of sustainability is cultural sustainability: encompassing questions of amenity, mobility, identity and belonging. These important aspects of rural living can have significant impacts on retaining populations and providing quality of life, yet cultural aspects of sustainability remain under-examined in research on rural areas. This thesis discusses the contributions that music makes to cultural sustainability in one Australian rural setting in transition – the Bega Valley, a rural area on the Far South Coast of NSW. Previous examinations of music’s contributions to regional development, studied predominantly in an urban context, have emphasised creative industries and commercial music markets. Music has become a popular means for cities – from Memphis to Liverpool and New Orleans – to rejuvenate economies and identities. In a rural Australian setting, however, low and sparse populations, physical distance and isolation combine to limit prospects for commercial music markets. In such locations musical creativity takes different forms. By looking beyond ideas of creativity forged within research on urban spaces, this thesis explores music in an Australian rural region, beyond commercial markets, where those markets have failed to be viable. Community-oriented music practices beyond the market economy are rooted in everyday, meaningful community engagement. Such rural musical practices reshape existing discussions surrounding cultural sustainability and creative industries. The specific aims of this thesis were: 1. to document the extent and significance of musical activities in an Australian rural region; 2. to illustrate the musical creativity that emerges in an Australian rural area where commercial markets fail (including a sub-case study of community choirs); 3. to highlight the particulars of place when considering the potential benefits of music for
individuals and communities; and 4. to illustrate the importance to rural residents of music (and creative outlets) for fostering community, a sense of identity, and overall increased sense of wellbeing. Participant observations were combined with a mix of semi-structured and ‘vox pop’ interviews to gain an understanding of how music shapes individuals’ sense of self and belonging when living in a rural area. Results are framed in two sections. The first highlights the specifics of creating and participating in music in the Bega Valley, the limits to commercial music markets and opportunities, and the emergence of a non-market, community music scene. The second focuses on one type of community music, choir singing, and delves into the way in which choirs, and living in ‘The Valley’, have shaped the experiences and benefits of choir groups for participants. There are four key findings: first, individuals in the Valley use music as a way to carve out their identity and foster a sense of belonging in an at times isolating and difficult environment. Second, despite that there are minimal commercial markets for music performance and consumption in the Valley, musical activity is prolific and very much a part of everyday life for many residents. Third, a much clearer understanding of the benefits, and contributions of music to the participants, and their community, requires consideration of the place where the Valley’s choirs have formed; and fourth, lifestyle migration, a phenomenon documented across Australia, has been crucial in bringing flows of professional musicians into the Valley, with resulting creative community initiatives giving residents alternative ways to socialize and self-identify.
Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank Chris Gibson for all of his support throughout this project and for encouraging me to come to Australia. Chris was an inspiration throughout my undergraduate degree and proved to be a great match for my post-graduate work. His knowledge, support and experience were crucial to all aspects of this thesis, but I would like to especially thank him for his dedication and guidance as the project came to a close. I have learned so much from his attention to detail in writing and research in general. Thank you for providing me with the tools to engage with, and enjoy my research.

I would like to thank participants Geoffrey, Don, Fiona, Arati and Mareta for your openness and enthusiasm to share your stories and the place you live. You all added tremendously to this project and made my time in Bega, and Australia, memorable. I would also like to thank Anna de Jong and Chris Brennan-Horley for your edits and ideas in the final stages. And thank you to Chris Brennan-Horley for a place to stay during research visits and my first introduction to Bega and the Valley.

Finally I want to say thank you to my family. Thank you to my supportive parents for bringing Christmas to Australia and for encouraging me to follow my interests (however far they may take me from home). And to Samuel whose support has been unwavering. Thank you for taking a chance and coming with me on this Australian adventure.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

‘Our lives may be sliced in two by the need for wages, may be artificially split into labour and leisure… but we heal the cut when we make music, because we belong to a place…’ (Livings 1975, p. 19)

People make and listen to music for a variety of reasons. A myriad of benefits are gained by individuals and communities by participating in music. In addition to the possible economic benefits that accrue from developing music enterprises and related creative industries, music practices can foster feelings of community, and belonging while establishing a sense of self-identity. Music practices offer alternative ways of finding happiness then those promoted by neoliberalism and consumerism (Walmsley 2012). Through engaging in intellectually and socially stimulating community music programs and projects individuals add deeper meaning to their lives. In her seminal essay on the topic, Susan Smith wrote of the use of music by marginalized people throughout history as the one outlet available for them to ‘enhance their lives and challenge their marginality’ (Smith 1997, p. 516). This thesis discusses one such marginalised group, musicians and music fans within an isolated and sparsely populated rural Australian community.

Rural and remote residents in Australia face uncertain futures: harsh weather patterns fluctuating between droughts and floods, physical and mental isolation, and decreasing access to public services. Such issues deeply shape this research; but in this thesis I also seek to tell other stories: of people engaging with music constructively and creatively, in an archetypal rural place that despite its small population is host to a number of music-related groups and events. In what follows I explore the generation of, and engagement with, musical practices.
in the Bega Valley. In a region where a commercial music market remains forever fragile, community music programs flourish. Through listening to those involved in such programs, and through a close study of community choirs as one example, I explore the significance and meanings of music, and their wider social and creative role in rural places. At the outset, in this chapter I will define key concepts and contextualise this thesis in a series of academic debates: on creativity and music, rurality, music and place, and community music (especially choirs). I also introduce the case study region, the Bega Valley, towards the end of this chapter.

1.1. Creative Economies, Commercial Music and Academic Research

One scholarly context for this research is the debate surrounding the contributions of creativity to regional development. Creativity is increasingly viewed as a facilitator of regional development via creative industries. Creative industries refers to a suite of commercial sectors related to culture and innovation that are viewed as important to urban and regional economic fortunes – typically design, art, film, television, fashion, and music (Gibson 2010). Until recently, work on creative industries has been focussed on urban centres and creative industries within cities. Such industries are supported by commercial markets made possible in centres with critical mass, suitable infrastructure and sufficient populations to support audiences; their incorporation into urban and regional development strategies has thus been oriented in a fashion that put economic gains at the forefront of their ambitions. Such thinking gained pace especially in the early 2000s after influential books by Richard Florida (on the ‘creative class’) and Charles Landry (on the ‘creative city’). Subsequent work by Peck (2004), Gibson and Klocker (2005) and many others critiqued the positioning of creativity within the bounds of economic interest and neoliberal policy structures, and more recent work (for example, Luckman et al. 2007; Mayes 2010 (a, b); Bennett 2010; Brennan-
Horley 2010; Connell and Rugendyke 2010; Warren and Gibson 2011) has emphasized alternative forms, and uses of creativity found within small cities, working-class and industrial contexts, and rural areas. In such diverse circumstances, creativity can be a means to community building, place identity, expression and artistic innovation. This thesis seeks to add to this latter literature by highlighting different forms of, and aims for, musical creativity in a rural Australian setting, and how music can provide a multitude of benefits for participants, beyond commercial concerns.

1.2 The ‘Rural’

A second scholarly context for this research concerns ‘the rural’. In a basic sense, the ‘rural’ is defined, physically, as a region delimited by certain population trends and agrarian economic activities, such as primary production (Pritchard and McManus 2000; Connell and McManus 2011). But, with the advent of the so-called ‘post-productivist countryside and increasingly fluid flows of tourists, in- and out-migrants, such simple definitions no longer hold true. The rural is also defined as a culturally and socially constructed place in which certain moral and cultural values are prioritized (for example knowledge of, and connections to, land for agriculture) (Mormont 1990), and in which imagined versions of rurality hold sway (Gibson and Davidson 2004). Such values and morals are informed by histories of the rural and vary across communities and space (Gorman-Murray et al. 2008). Within Australia, what are considered rural areas can include a number of different physical environments and social contexts: traditional broad acre agricultural regions (and towns), mixed land-use regions with hobby farmers, tourism ventures and ‘tree-change’ migrants, rangelands regions with marginal pastoral activities, and even very remote areas with scattered Aboriginal settlements and little in the way of agricultural production. For the sake of this thesis, ‘rural’ will be understood as the areas outside of major Australian cities that have small and
dispersed populations. This definition is intuitively and repetitively applied to the Bega Valley, the case study of the thesis. In addition ‘rural’ unavoidably connotes that the area is subject to issues such as population decline, economic restructuring and job shortages.

An additional complexity throughout rural Australia, and in the Bega Valley, is that out-migrations of young people and overall population decline has been overlaid with counter-flows of in-migrants seeking rural amenity, lifestyle changes and a more relaxed pace of life (Connell and McManus 2011). Many small towns, and especially coastal ones in eastern Australia, have experienced varying degrees of growth as a result of urban-rural migration from capital cities alongside intra-rural migration into commuter centres and small towns (Burnley and Murphy 2004). The decline of country towns has attracted media attention and policy and academic research in efforts to find ways to revitalize rural towns (Connell and Gibson 2011, 2012). In-migration for lifestyle and amenity reasons are part of this mix (Connell and McManus 2011), and link to this thesis through the role of music in providing in-migrants with a means to come to terms with their new home region, through community music initiatives, choirs and festivals.

1.3 Music and Academic Research

Music and place

A third, and substantive scholarly context for this thesis is the literature on music and place. Such themes are of interest to geographers because of the complex combination of cultural, economic, and political meanings that come together through music, in place. There has yet to be a culture in recorded history that has not had some sort of rhythm, or dance component to their rituals and celebrations (Lomax 1968; Connell and Gibson 2003). As a geographer such cultural expressions can be studied from multiple points of view, from the present day
commodification of music to the origins of certain rhythms to continents and people (Leyshon et al. 1998; Bennett et al. 2006). Geographers are equipped to engage with such research because of their appreciation for place and the political, economical, social and cultural importance of music practices.

Place is innately linked to music, from the transformation of less than impressive buildings like Sun records, in Memphis, Tennessee, into international travel destinations, to places in lyrics of popular music (Cohen 1995; Leyshon et al. 1998; Connell and Gibson 2003; Johansson and Bell 2009). By focusing on an under-appreciated music practice (community music) within a place otherwise unknown for music (the Bega Valley), this thesis seeks to contribute to the growing research literature on the geography of music.

Music and identity

Identity has many meanings and for the sake of this thesis, it will be understood in a pragmatic sense as the socially and culturally constructed way in which an individual perceives themselves (Giddens 1991; DeNora 1995a). Giddens’ (1991) work addresses self-identity in such a way that it is determined and shaped by outside influences while also iteratively shaping society. Within this thesis discussions surrounding self-identity are related to performances and understandings of ones’ aesthetic-self. Giddens’ (1991) work compliments such discussions by reinforcing the fluidity of self and the influence of environmental surroundings such as music in shaping and understanding ones’ self.

Identity is formed in and through performances, meaning that people participate in activities that perpetuate their self-identity to both themselves and others (Rudd 2009). Such presentations reassure oneself of who one is (DeNora 1995b). Reliving or remembering past performances is another means for perpetuating self-identity. DeNora (1995b, 2000) has
written extensively on the role that music plays in remembering actions connected to self-identity. This is a theme that recurs within the case study of this thesis, and especially in the example of community choirs.

1.4 Community Music and Choirs

Community music is a pre-industrial (especially with respect to choir groups) form of music that, in its original form, is not produced for the means of commercial consumption. Rather, community music is driven by a desire to educate, socialize and engage a community. Professional scenes in contrast tend to be driven by individual artists and companies in search of profit. There are inevitably times when aspects of community and commercial music overlap. Community music is a contentious term; it can be considered to some as a means of music education outside of schools and private lessons (Veblen 2008), or as something more political – ‘music making with social goals’ (Rimmer 2009, p. 71). For the sake of this thesis, Marcus Breen’s (1994) definition will be used. Breen first addressed the term ‘community’ which within community music, tends to be defined by propinquity and geographical space (cf. Walmsley 2000), because it is through geographical proximity that grassroots productions and associations usually occur (Breen 1994). Breen (1994, p. 314) outlined three key goals of community music: “it exists for its own sake, as an art form; it exists as an expression of community development; or it exists to feed into and develop the music industry”. Based on these goals Breen divides community music formats into seven categories: Utilitarian, Industrial, Oppositional, Normative, Pluralist, Consensus and Welfare. The format of Australian community music tends to most commonly conform to a Pluralist model, described by Breen as focusing on accessibility and providing opportunities for ‘otherwise silent/songless groups’ (Breen 1994, p. 322). Community music in the Bega
Valley can take the form of musical theatre productions, orchestras, festival performances, small instrumental ensembles and – as will be discussed in the next section – choirs.

Choir singing

According to the American based *Choral Journal* there are 12,000 recognized choirs in the United States; 1 out of 10 Americans commit to a weekly meeting with others for singing activities either as registered groups or informally (Sayer 2010). In Australia, a capella has been called ‘possibly the most vigorous[ly] organized amateur musical movement’ (Smith 2005, p. 151). In the 1990s and 1980s hundreds of groups were created across the continent varying from small ensembles to large community choirs (Smith 2005). Choirs can take shape through church groups or schools or simply be created without institutional affiliation by those who love to sing. Choirs can also be professional. The choristers in this study are nevertheless not paid to sing. Their main objective is to enjoy creating music and learning, as well as to promote ‘pluralist’ agendas of social inclusion.

Choirs are a form of professional and community oriented music participation. Previous studies have looked at their role in inspiring national identity (Humphey and Zheng-Ting et al. 2006), their importance in forming social bonds for young children (Hallum 2010), their ability to improve the wellbeing of elderly (Cohen et al. 2006), the isolated (Langston and Barrett 2008), as well as the role that choirs can play in revitalising communities (Dunphy 2009). Choirs build cultural, social, political and economic connections between members and communities.

Although existing literature on choirs draws out such sociological links, the importance of place in shaping the relationships, benefits and experiences of members has not yet been significantly explored. In studies of choirs and national identity there is a need to not only
address the cultural context of the country but also the town, and community, in which the group exists. Likewise work that attempts to survey multiple choirs in a region and draw conclusions without consideration for the uniqueness of each community is necessarily limited (Smith 1999; Dougherty and Hedden 2006). Place matters enormously. For example rural areas often lack critical masses of potential choristers and as a result often do not hold auditions. Choirs in urban centres however, may hold more than one. This one simple component can shape the population of the choir and a community’s relationship with it.

Some previous research does mention in passing the location of a choir but rarely do they flesh out the significance of place in shaping the group (Faulkner and Davidson 2006). Through conducting this study it became apparent that both professional and community choirs are very important to members and communities in fostering identity, social and emotional bonds, and contributing to quality of life. Place shapes the accessibility of choirs, the type of relationships established within them and gives context to the meaning and release sought from participation in them.

1.5 The Bega Valley, NSW, Australia: Why Study Music in this Country Town?

Field work for this study was undertaken in the Bega Valley (a.k.a. ‘The Valley’), a rural area in south-eastern NSW, Australia (Figure 1.1). The reasons for this are threefold. First, country towns are undergoing a number of changes, (discussed in more depth in Chapter 2) and have increasingly diverse populations made up of in-migrants from urban areas (within the Valley, predominantly Sydney and Melbourne), and long-time residents who may be looking for a new start (Burnley, 1988). Rural Australia is home to increasingly vulnerable populations with senses-of-self and ideas of personal and community identity in flux. The Bega Valley epitomises these transitions and tensions.
Second, this research was supported by a project funded by the Australian Research Council entitled: ‘Cultural Sustainability in Australian Country Towns: amenity, mobility and everyday life’ (on which my supervisor is a Chief Investigator). The project aims to find out how it is that country towns in Australia are managing to sustain amenity and cultural life in what is a time of rebuilding and restructuring. This project explores cultural sustainability in three separate country towns in Australia: Swan Hill, VIC, Nambucca, NSW and Bega, NSW. The thesis therefore provides an in-depth analysis in one of the project’s designated case study locations. In the broader ARC project, cultural sustainability is understood through three themes; 1. belonging and representation; 2. mobility and change; and 3. cultural institutions, heritage and innovation (Driscoll et al. 2008, p. 5). This thesis contributes to the larger project by investigating how a place, the Bega Valley, has shaped the existence and
perseverance of music, and more specifically choirs. The study also seeks to contribute to one of the larger project’s overarching goals of contesting preconceptions about the cultural vitality of rural life in Australian country towns. As Gibson et al (2010) argue, rural places are often assumed to be ‘uncultured’, or ‘void’ of creativity – something this thesis seeks to contest.

The third reason for pursuing this study, and for choosing to focus in a rural area, is related to my own experiences, upbringing and interest. I grew up on a beef cattle farm in rural Ontario, Canada. There are a number of similarities between the Bega Valley and my own home. The region is a mix of artists and musicians, farmers, and retirees and young families from the city looking for something different. Community loyalties often stay with long-time residents and newly arrived city people are often blamed for all unwanted changes and frustrations. But like in rural Ontario, music in The Valley is one of the ways in which people from all backgrounds can mix and interact. I made some of my closest friends while growing up in rural Ontario through sneaking into bars with bands, playing music trivia on route to horse shows and taking long trips to Toronto to catch popular acts. Live music for me has always been about escaping with my friends and family for a taste of another life (one where I did not smell like manure!). In a much broader context, music is a way in which all rural residents – long time, newly arrived, teenagers and retirees struggling with changes in their lives – can find stability, coherence and the emotional release that they need. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Bega Valley.

1.6 Research Aims:

The aims of this project are:

1. to document the extent and significance of musical activities in an Australian rural region;
2. to illustrate the musical creativity that emerges in an Australian rural area where commercial markets fail (including a sub-case study of community choirs);

3. to highlight the particulars of place when considering the potential benefits of music for individuals and communities; and

4. to illustrate the importance to rural residents of music (and creative outlets) for fostering community, a sense of identity, and overall increased sense of wellbeing.

1.7 Thesis Outline:

This thesis is organised to help the reader understand the importance of considering place when discussing creativity and music practices. Chapter 2 gives context to the work by introducing key concepts and studies related to rural geography, creative and cultural industries, and discourses of music, place, identity and wellbeing. I also specifically discuss literature on choirs, given its special status as a ‘case study within a case study’. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methods used and why they were chosen to undertake this research. Chapter 4 introduces the Bega Valley and how the particulars of place shape the experiences of being a musician and music fan in the Valley. Chapter 5 examines music practices in the Bega Valley through the lens of choirs and reveals how residents engage with music and in doing so increase their quality of life. Finally Chapter 6 discusses results and concludes the study with suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2

Rurality, Music and Community: A Review of Relevant Literature

This chapter outlines the literature which gives context to this thesis. First I summarize the relevant literature on rural Australia and rural life. This includes discussions surrounding migration, wellbeing, and gender roles. Next is an introduction to work on creative industries and creativity in rural areas followed by a brief discussion of commercial and community music. To close the chapter, a somewhat lengthier section on music, choirs and academic discourse outlines important connections between place, identity and wellbeing. Each section and theme is relevant to later discussions on music practices in the Bega Valley.

2.1 Rural Australia

Despite generalisations and stigmas, rural areas are inherently diverse (Pritchard and McManus 2000; Connell and McManus 2011). While rural populations of course include farmers and miners, it is increasingly likely that there will be a balance of farmers, artists, bankers, teachers and government workers all with different histories and political views (Gray 1994; Lockie and Bourke 2001). In Australia rural areas also encompass very different physical environments: from bush to rainforest and desert to coastline. This section outlines academic debate about some of the key circumstances affecting rural areas which have shaped the Bega Valley: 1. migration; 2. access and mobility; 3. health and wellbeing; 4. gender roles and their impact on rural life.

Since the 1960s rural areas in Australia, the UK, Canada and the United States have been said to be in decline (Pritchard and McManus 2000; Barr 2007; Connell and McManus 2011). A decline in population has largely been paralleled with structural changes in agriculture
The need to decrease commodity prices in order to be competitive in the global market has meant that farmers have had to increase production (Cocklin and Dibden 2005; Barr 2007). Prices of land and machinery combined with increasing debts and drastically varying growing seasons (including worsening floods and droughts) has left many farmers leaving their fields (Lockie and Bourke 2001; Barr 2007). When combined with other patterns of migration (see below) this has resulted in a number of farming towns in Australia becoming precarious, or even unviable (Cocklin and Dibden 2005; Barr 2007). The Bega Valley is an example of such a region where towns have undergone a change in population and economic focus over the last 20 years. Out-migration of farmers and other rural people and in-migration of previously urban dwellers has had notable impact on Australia’s country towns, including on those found in the Bega Valley.

2.1.1 Migration and rural population

Both out-migration and in-migration increase the heterogeneity of rural areas and both processes are shaped by an array of factors (Gray 1994; Connell and McManus 2011). According to Smailes (2012, p. 80), the level of out-migration and in-migration of a given rural town is shaped by three important geographical factors: 1. proximity to urban centres and coastline, 2. the desirability of the local environment, and 3. the density of the existing population. Particularities of place are critical in shaping the population dynamics of rural areas (Gray 1994; Tonts 2005; Connell and McManus 2011; Argent and Walmsley 2008; Gibson 2008), including the Bega Valley.

The Bega Valley has both coastal and inland towns – the largest, Bega (population 4,536) located 18 kilometres inland, and Merimbula (population 3,851), located on the coast – as well as a patchwork of 12 smaller towns, villages and hamlets scattered across 6,280 square
kilometres of rural land. It is a classic example of an area shaped by counterposing population movements. The 1960s brought higher incomes, the ability for early retirement and the growing popularity of second homes in coastal regions (Burnley and Murphy 1995; Alston 2004; Connell and McManus 2011), as well as countercultural movements of ‘hippies’, artists and musicians who sought idyllic retreat from urban ills (Gibson 2002a). As Connell and McManus (2011) noted, the purchasing of holiday homes helped local economies in small coastal towns but did little to prevent the decline of inland rural areas. This can be seen in the Bega Valley where, for instance, Merimbula has become a popular second-home coastal town, with accompanying retail, hospitality and cultural industries growth, as opposed to Bega (an inland dairy town), which has economically and demographically stagnated.

During the 1970s counter-urbanisation to the coast was influenced by higher incomes, cheaper housing (in small towns), mobility (better roads), and the desirability of the landscape (Burnley and Murphy 1995; Burnley and Murphy 2004; Connell and McManus 2011). More money meant that people could afford to move farther from their urban homes and purchase second homes in desirable locations. Better roads between cities, and within meant that commuting between smaller towns and larger cities for work was more feasible. As a result of increased mobility living in rural areas became slightly less isolating (Burnley and Murphy 1995; Burnley and Murphy 2004; Connell and McManus 2011), yet contradictorily, many smaller settlements lost populations to larger regional centres. Affordable housing in small towns increased the in-migration of people who could no longer afford city housing prices – in what was known as welfare migration (Hugo and Bell 1998), while counter-urbanisation was also tightly connected to what is termed ‘lifestyle migration’ (Hugo and Smailes 1985; Walmsley et al. 1998; Holmes 2008; Connell and McManus 2011). Lifestyle migration is used to describe people who have ‘downshifted’ – moved out of the city for a quieter life and possibly more self-sufficient way of living, such as growing their
own food (Hamilton and Mail 2003; Gurran 2008). With respect to the Bega Valley Burnley (1988) noted that in-migration trends were particularly significant because they were fed from both Sydney and Melbourne (from which the region is roughly equidistant).

In popular culture there have been two important labels used to describe such population movements. The 1990s saw the rise of the term ‘sea change’, originally based on the ABC Television series of the same name, which essentially describes the relocation of people to coastal areas for a lifestyle change – something more simple, more tranquil (Burnley and Murphy 2004). This movement was characterized by a desire for people to move out of big cities and start new in a smaller town with a better quality of life (Connell and McManus 2011). The second term is ‘tree change’ which describes the movement of people inland. This movement was by no means as strong as that to the coast, but for people seeking cheaper housing and another variant on the simple life, it was an alternative (Burnley and Murphy 2004; Salt 2006; Connell and McManus 2011). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, sea and tree change have shaped the population of the coastal and inland towns of the Bega Valley Shire. In turn they have played an important role in shaping the region’s musical landscape.

One common feature of sea and tree change movements has been an in-migration of professionals of all sorts – including musicians – who can benefit the community. Andersen’s (2010) work on the in-migration of artists into Broken Hill since the 1970s highlights the increased tourism and cultural activities within the region catalysed by professionals. Brown and Kirkman (2007) examined the role of in-migrating professional musicians within a community and what they offered to community music programs. Professional musicians’ shared leadership and knowledge enhances possibilities for community music programs and improves their quality. The educational and leadership role
played by musicians and artists who live in rural areas, and move to them, cannot be underestimated. This is a theme that will reverberate throughout this thesis.

Youth out-migration in rural Australia

Another layer of complexity is provided by patterns of rural youth migration. Typical of rural Australia’s population today is out-migration of youth, resulting in an overall ageing of the remaining regional population (Argent and Walmsley 2008; Davies 2008; Drozdzewski 2008; Easthope and Gabriel 2008; Gibson and Argent 2008; Gibson 2008). Reasons for this are predominantly linked to desires for tertiary education, changes in social status and more and better occupation-related opportunities (Argent and Walmsley 2008). Drozdzewski (2008) found in Coffs Harbour (northern coast of NSW) that additional influences for youth out-migration included having moved to the region during childhood and having had an older sibling already moved out of the area. Easthope and Gabriel (2008) in contrast questioned whether youth migration from rural areas is expected, or normalized within certain regions. Valentine (2000) noted that this particular time in a young adult’s life was also a time for carving out an identity and this may need to be done outside of the community and away from parents. However, Davies (2008) work found that youth who had previously lived in a rural area were more likely to move back than urban youth were to move to a rural region. This was because rural areas were often associated with being socially isolating and having limited job opportunities (Davies 2008). Within work on possible ways to stem such youth out-migration Gibson (2008) discussed that although employment opportunities would be limited by funding availability and market stability, a promotion of creative industries in rural areas would help enhance youth’s wellbeing and sense of belonging. Gibson (2008) also noted that positive community involvement would help curve negative stigmas against young people and benefit youth retention.
Youth in rural and urban areas often feel socially excluded and sometimes isolated physically and mentally (Gabriel 2002; Alston 2004; Alston and Kent 2009). Leisure activities that can engage youth in the community and offer them a sense of belonging, can be extremely limited in rural areas. Compounding feelings of isolation, youth in rural areas are generally dependent on parents for transportation to extracurricular activities (Nutley 2003; Gibson 2008). Understanding the state of youth out-migration in rural areas helps to contextualize the desire for residents to include young people in community music programs.

2.1.2 Issues of access and mobility

Rural areas frequently lack the infrastructure that urban areas can provide. Small and dispersed populations along with limited tax bases, from which to provide public transport, means that rural and remote populations must rely on personal vehicles, infrequent bus services, or volunteer run community transport (Nutley 2003; Gray et al. 2006; Connell and McManus 2011). Poor access to public transportation decreases mobility of rural residents. In much of the literature regarding mobility in rural areas, populations at risk are generally identified as youth, elderly and those with disabilities (Gething 1997; Nutley 2003; Larson et al. 2004; Bull et al. 2008). Limited mobility can increase feelings of isolation by disengaging residents from community activities and social outings.

Accessibility is defined by Farrington and Farrington (2005, p. 2), as ‘the ability of people to reach and engage in opportunities and activities’. Based on this definition Farrington and Farrington (2005) identify five ways that accessibility can be affected: by age, gender, space, income and ethnicity – for example residents who are too young, or old, to have a driving permit depend on others for transportation (Mosley 1979; Nutley 2003). Women are recognized in rural areas in Australia as being less mobile than men due to economic discrimination and subsequent inability to afford personal vehicles (Law 1999; Larson et al.
Space refers to the physical distance between amenities and people – the larger the distance the harder it is to travel (Farrington and Farrington 2005). Income refers to the ability of individuals to afford personal vehicles and plane tickets to overcome larger distances (Farrington and Farrington 2005). Finally, ethnicity can limit accessibility to services (Nutley 2003). An example of this is in work done by O’Brien et al. (2000) who found that due to limited access to health services, because of rural and remote living, Aboriginal women were at much higher risk of dying from cervical cancer than non-Aboriginal women in rural and urban areas. Such discussions surrounding accessibility, and therefore mobility, are intertwined with those of social justice (Farrington and Farrington 2005; Gray et al. 2006). As will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the Valley has little public transportation and no linking rail line. Residents who do not have access to a personal vehicle are greatly limited in their mobility, and accessibility to, amongst other services, community organizations. Mobility therefore limits who can participate in community groups, including in music groups such as choirs. As a result, the overall geographic pattern of musical activity, and sense of ‘scene’ that emerges in the Bega Valley, is refracted through widespread inaccessibility.

2.1.3 Issues of health and wellbeing

Recent studies have found that residents of rural Australia are now suffering more from health problems than their urban counterparts (Dixon and Welch 2000; O’Brien et al. 2000; Judd et al. 2006; Stain et al. 2008). Evidence of this is seen in higher mortality rates, cases of diabetes, injury, and suicide (Dixon and Welch 2000; Judd et al. 2006). As Barr (2007) and others have noted, the in-migration of retirees and low-income earners has also increased the pressure on existing health care systems and other public services. Part of the discrepancies between rural and urban wellbeing can be explained by the social determinants of health in
rural areas (Dixon and Welch 2000). Social determinants of health are those aspects that compose the context of life (place of residence, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age and gender) (Dixon and Welch 2000). Such determinants also shape levels of accessibility (as discussed above). Rural residents are an at risk population; a fact that gives intensified meaning to the social and leisure activities, including music, with which they engage.

Decreased health and wellbeing in rural Australia has been found to correlate with a number of factors such as physical mobility and access to health services as well as a culture of only seeking professional help when illness is severe (Elliot-Schmidt et al. 1997; Dixon and Welch 2000; Bar 2007). Within rural areas there tend to be an overwhelming amount of the population who see doctors and health professionals only when something is wrong (Dixon and Welch 2000; Elliot-Schmidt et al. 1997). This decreases the opportunity for early detection and preventive measures. Dixon and Welch (2000, p. 259), argue for the need to understand how ‘individuals embody aspects of place’ in order to comprehend the resulting health issues; residents in rural areas, especially farmers, are often ‘type A’ personalities who are independent and avoid seeking help (Dixon and Welch 2000, p. 257). Therefore understanding social roles for example can help give context as to why individuals in certain places have an increased risk of disease.

Another impact of rural culture on residents’ wellbeing is that mental health issues are stigmatized and therefore seeking help for such problems is often not considered (Komiti et al. 2006; Stain et al. 2008). Mental illness in rural areas is in part connected to stress induced by financial problems and health issues as well as out-migration of family and friends (Elliot-Schmidt et al. 1997; Dixon and Welch, 2000; Komiti et al. 2006). The in and out-migration of family and loved ones has been found to increase feelings of isolation and depression (Dixon
and Welch 2000; Easthorpe and Gabriel 2008). Within rural areas social connections can be hard to form and the loss of close friends and family is felt intensely.

Outside of organized programs, social networks in most rural communities and small towns are shaped by small and dispersed populations. In general, small towns can foster deep connections between residents who might not have met in a more populated region (Bourke 2001a). A small population can equate to an increase in the number of acquaintances (Bourke 2001b). This can provide a feeling of safety for residents (Lockie and Bourke 2001; Connell and McManus, 2011), and ameliorate the above problems of isolation and social disconnection. Nevertheless, close connections and multiple acquaintances can induce feelings of suffocation, or that someone is always watching. Opinions that do not coincide with popular beliefs, as well as the spread of rumours and gossip, can lead to isolation and marginalization of residents (Bourke 2001b; Tonts 2005; Duffy and Waitt 2011). In Australian rural areas single mothers (through widowing or divorce) are often especially marginalized socially (Grace and Lennie 2002; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). Their participation in an alternative gender role is seen as deviant (Bourke 2001; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). Single women may also be perceived as a threat to other women who fear they will lose their husbands to such women (Bourke 2001; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). As will be discussed in later chapters, community music programs can offer important alternative venues to socialize and form close bonds with others who share similar beliefs and experiences.

2.1.4 Gender roles and rural living

Much of what has been written on gender roles in rural areas, particularly female gender roles, has been focused within the context of agriculture (Alston 1995; Teather 1998; Little 2002). As illustrated in the previous discussions, rural populations have been ‘diluted’ from
the influx of lifestyle migrants mixing new-migrants and long-term (some farming) residents (Smailes 2010; Connell and McMannus 2011). Therefore the emphasis in gender literature on on-farm experiences of women is somewhat misleading. As Liepins (2000) and Little (2002) have noted, traditional agricultural values and gender roles in Australia do influence masculinity and femininity to be performed in particular ways, though as I seek to show in this thesis, new leisure and cultural activities, including music, provide a means to negotiate and contest gender relations.

Traditionally, within agriculture men and women take on particular roles. Such roles have been dominated by women running the household and men often running livestock and crops (Stebbing 1984; Alston 1995; Barr 2007). There are obvious variations to this with women often having prominent roles in particular parts of harvest as well as the task of maintaining the home (Alston 1995; Barr 2007). Notwithstanding nuances, stereotypical male and female gender roles in rural Australia nevertheless influence the wellbeing and sense of belonging of men and women.

For many men in rural Australia sports teams and clubs tend to dominate social interactions (Mewett 1999; Tonts 2005; Clifton 2012). Sports teams are mediums for increasing an individual’s sense of belonging and community pride (Mewett 1999; Tonts 2005; Clifton 2012). Such social interactions can perpetuate stereotypical Australian male identities attached to sport playing, drinking, gambling and heterosexuality (Clifton 2012; Gorman-Murray et al. 2008; Little 2003; Gibson 2013). McLean (1995, p. 85) describes:

> Male camaraderie or ‘mateship’ is founded in sharing the rituals of masculine identity. The exclusion of women is an integral aspect, and many of these rituals turn out to be destructive or oppressive. Binge drinking, gambling and violent sports are obvious examples.
In Australia male identity has been historically shaped by feelings that men ‘were meant to be heroes, patriarchs, warriors, powerhouses, impenetrable, immovable, unyielding and without emotion’ (Tim Winton quoted in Harrison 2009, p. 4). Playing sports and hanging out at pubs perpetuates this male identity through competition, and aggression while marginalizing those who do not identify with it, giving way to feelings of isolation (Bird 1996; Gorman-Murray et al. 2008; Little 2002). In rural Australia, male identity is performed through such social activities, reinforcing a male’s sense of self-identity and belonging with male community members (Tonts 2005; Clifton, 2012). Woodward (2000) and Gorman-Murray et al. (2008) both pointed to the heterosexuality inherent in these perceptions of masculinity and therefore the marginalization of those who did not conform to stereotypes because of sexual preference or alternative performances of masculinity.

Work on women in rural areas has been less conclusive as to whether a particular stereotype of femininity exists. However, work by Bryant (1999) notes that women’s sense of self within farming is attached to their perception of the role of the female body, to reproduce and care for a husband and children. Similarly, Little and Panelli (2003, p. 282) found that women were understood to only practice activities that ‘would nurture, service and maintain traditional values, practices and relations’. Brandth (1994) documented how, in Norway, gender roles have changed with the restructuring of family farms. Women now often work away from the farm to help supplement family income in addition to their regular on farm duties such as book-keeping, house chores and helping out in the field when necessary (Alston 1995; Barr 2007). Similar changes have occurred in Australia. However there are still traces of perceptions that women in rural areas are traditionally caregivers, community focused and that they are dependent on men for mobility, and money (Dempsey 1992; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). Such perceptions perpetuate very narrow gender roles.
There are also links between female gender roles and health and wellbeing. A WHA (Women’s Health Australia) longitudinal study found that over 11 percent of rural women lacked someone in their life with which they felt they could ‘share their most private fears and worries’ (Warner-Smith and Brown 2002, p. 40). Teather (1992) argued that rural women needed dedicated places to convene and communicate, because they suffered more from poverty and domestic violence than their male counterparts. Gibson and Waitt (forthcoming) illustrated this with respect to an art space in the Bega Valley which has been created by women to support other local artists, predominantly women, in their creative endeavours. In a dairy town where visual art was not prevalent, let alone done and sold by women, the art space, and community within it, became a place for social support as well as artistic creativity (Gibson and Waitt, forthcoming). For women, living in a rural area can not only be physically isolating but mentally and culturally isolating (Dempsey 1992; Grace and Lennie 2002; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). Spaces like the Spiral Gallery in Gibson and Waitt’s (forthcoming) work highlights the need for alternative places for women, and men, to feel a sense of belonging and identity in rural areas. As will be discussed later in this thesis, all-women choirs in the Valley are another such space of support.

Feelings of isolation for both men and women can be difficult to overcome. Studies on women and leisure activities have shown that such activities can:

Provide opportunities for women to relax and recuperate from the stresses and fatigue of everyday responsibilities, to offer opportunities to express individuality and to be creative, and to provide an important context for social networks to be established and maintained (Warner-Smith and Brown 2002, p. 39).

Leisure time in rural areas gives both men and women a sense of meaning to life while stimulating minds and increasing social interactions (Warner-Smith and Brown 2002; Tonts
2005; Smailes 2010 and cf. Walmsley 2012). This is especially important for women given their often amplified isolation in rural areas (Dempsey 1992; Grace and Lennie 2002; Warner-Smith and Brown 2002). Community music practices, considered here to be broadly a leisure activity (though they are equally a ‘productive’ cultural activity), will prove to be vital to residents’ sense of wellbeing and belonging.

2.2 Markets and Cultural Industries

In the last decade a growing number of academics and city planners have sought to answer questions of why people choose to live in certain areas, and in particular, cities, by noting the presence of ‘creative’ activities. Richard Florida’s (2002) work, among others, began a discussion purposing the importance of ‘creative industries’ in retaining and attracting new migrants. Creativity quickly became a means to gain cultural capital (Gibson and Klocker 2005), and creative activities appeared to concentrate most in certain kinds of large cities, that had requisite subcultures, production infrastructures and audience critical mass (Scott 2000). As a result, academic research within creative industries has been heavily focused within urban areas, and on the forms of creativity that dominate such centres (Gibson 2010).

More recently, a growing number of scholars have turned their focus to the purported periphery, examining the creativity that occurs in regional, rural and remote areas (Luckman et al. 2008; Andersen 2010; Bennet 2010; Gibson et al. 2010; Mayes 2010a). Such work has discussed the need to change how and where creative industry research is conducted (Brennan-Horley 2010; Felton et al. 2010; Potts and Cunningham 2007) and to broaden debates about what constitutes being ‘creative’ in place (Waitt and Gibson 2009; Mayes 2010; Gibson and Waitt forthcoming). What is important to take from this body of work, for the context of this thesis, are the discussions surrounding what ‘creativity’ means and the uniqueness of creative practices in rural areas.
The definition of the term ‘creative’ is contentious. Is it something inherent in all of us – a way in which we are able to express inner emotions and beliefs, or is it attached more closely to the ability to create something to match market ‘needs’ (Drake 2003; Gibson 2010)? In work pertaining to ‘creative industries’, ‘creativity’ is defined in part by its connection to the economy; to production for market-mediated consumption (Gibson and Klocker 2004; Markusen 2007). Work in rural, and remote areas has uncovered that creative industries and activities can have different relationships with communities and varying goals, and benefits, unrelated to profit (Mayes 2010a, b). This thesis shares a similar concern – exploring one form of creativity, music, which can be pursued either for profit or for non-economic goals. In a rural context such as the Bega Valley this question of the relationship of music to the market is a critical one – deeply shaping the manner of people’s engagements with music.

2.2.1 Creativity in rural and remote places

Research in rural areas has uncovered various types of, and uses for, creativity that differ from urban centres. In very general terms rural areas vary from urban in that they have smaller populations and fewer infrastructures such as community centres and public transportation (Connell and McManus 2011). An important difference, for the context of this thesis, is that because of such limitations rural areas often lack the ability to sustain traditional commercial markets related to ‘creative industries’ (Gibson 2008). Comparable work by Luckman et al. (2008) on the music ‘scene’ in the remote town of Darwin in Australia’s Northern Territory uncovered music practices unlike those in larger cities. Music scenes were not defined by one genre of music, or any one particular identity, but were composed of a collection of people who collaborated across different groups and genres, across the commercial/non-commercial divide, and took turns making music and listening to it (Luckman et al. 2008). Music practices in Darwin adapted to accommodate a changing, and
small population, from tourists, lingering travellers, and in- and out-migration, as well as its remoteness from the rest of Australia (Luckman et al. 2008). This is important to take into consideration when examining music in the Bega Valley because, as will be seen, like Darwin, it does not have a traditional ‘scene’. The market for commercially-mediated music is small and fragile, and people must find other ways to connect, to make and listen to music.

Other relevant work worth drawing attention to is that of Mayes (2010a, b) who looked at the making of postcards in a small rural Australian town. In her case study town (Ravensthorpe, WA), commercial producers refused to print postcards of the town because they did not feel there was a sufficient market to support them. A group of residents decided to generate the postcards themselves, more for the symbolic contribution to the town’s identity and community than for any explicit gain in profit. The significance of Mayes (2010a, b) work for this thesis is that the creative practice of postcard making was a means for fulfilling a need that the commercial market had failed. In addition, creativity was used primarily as a means to an end, as a medium in which residents could socialize and foster a sense of community (Mayes 2010b). This is an important distinction from the creative industries work which has traditionally emphasized the importance of making money (Banks 2007). Mayes’ work also points to the importance of studying everyday creative practices as a means for understanding the way in which “the rural is internalized, challenged and refashioned” (2010b, p. 22) by residents. This too is very important to this thesis which focuses on musical practices as everyday activities, rather than as exceptional or special events.

Another parallel is in the work mentioned previously by Gibson and Waitt (forthcoming) who studied the Spiral Gallery, an art space, as an alternative place for creative work and personal support in Bega. The types of work created by members and displayed at art shows varied from classic paintings and sculptures to what traditionally may be seen more as ‘crafts’
including paper making and textile work (Gibson and Waitt forthcoming). The gallery is positioned within the community as a place that accepts varying forms of art work and combines goals of producing quality art with providing a place for women (and men) in the Valley to create things they might not have otherwise had the chance to (Gibson and Waitt forthcoming). This work helps to frame the Valley as a place for such alternative creative spaces with multiple layers of community purpose, like the community music programs discussed in this thesis.

2.2.2 Festivals, place marketing and rural revitalization

Creative industry discussions, especially those instigated by Florida (2002), have inspired government policies emphasizing the economic benefits from the effective place-marketing of regions and the resulting influxes of the so-called ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002; Gibson and Klocker 2004). The stream of this literature which has investigated place-marketing and branding includes work looking at festivals and attractions. Connell and Gibson (2011, 2012) have examined extensively the role of festivals in providing communities with particular identities, images and reputations. A prime example is that of the regional town of Parkes, NSW, which has successfully rebranded itself as the Elvis capital of Australia through their annual Parkes Elvis Festival (Brennan-Horley et al. 2007; Connell and Gibson 2012). Through this re-branding the town holds an annual festival which stimulates the local economy and has given it a new identity, ‘putting the town on the map’ within Australia. Connell and Gibson’s (2011, 2012) work with festivals has also delved into some of the issues that can arise from place marketing through the exclusion of community members. This theme will be addressed during discussions of music festivals in the Bega Valley in Chapter 4.
Beyond place marketing, such work on festivals has uncovered the ability of events to increase volunteerism, and involvement as they tend to draw together residents from all areas of the community (Gibson and Connell 2011, 2012). Within the Valley festivals are key venues for musicians and fans but also as places of community involvement.

2.3 Music scenes

Since Will Straw’s (1991) seminal essay on the topic, popular music studies have begun to be more specific in the way in which musical communities are labelled and interpreted (Straw 1991; Hollows and Milestone 1998; Bennett and Peterson 2004; Luckman et al. 2008). Straw (1991, p. 373) describes a ‘scene’ as a “cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization”. A slightly more approachable (and applicable) definition is that of Sara Cohen (1999, p. 239), who describes a scene by the relationships and connections between people, venues, music related events and the production and consumption of music (of a singular genre). Such definitions of scenes have traditionally been used in work related to urban centres (Shank 1994; Cohen 1995; Hollows and Milestone 1998; Bennett 2002). As the term ‘scene’ has evolved, new work, such as that by Bennett and Peterson (2004) has uncovered alternative ways in which it can be used.

In their work Bennett and Peterson (2004) elaborated from Straw by redefining the way ‘scenes’ can transcend geographical boundaries by being either ‘local, translocal or virtual’ (cf. Walmsley 2000). This shift recognized that geographical location no longer was definitive of ‘scene’ but that musical communities could exist beyond a fixed location (Bennet and Peterson 2004). Although global trends inevitably impact local music scenes there is still a very tangible and often times more influential role that a local physical place
can play in shaping the availability of live music, and the accessibility of related resources and education (Connell and Gibson 2003; Luckman et al. 2008; McGregor and Gibson 2009; Warren and Evitt 2010; Gallan 2012). The Bega Valley is an example of one such place where local circumstances rather than global subcultural flows have the greatest influence on local music practices.

Indeed, so much do local circumstances fragment and limit musical activities in the Bega Valley, that the very question of whether the term ‘scene’ is appropriate becomes apparent (Finnegan 1989; Luckman et al. 2008). Using the term ‘scene’ to describe a coherent assemblage of musical activities in remote locations and places with smaller populations is especially difficult (see section 2.2.1). As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, small populations and large distances dictate the availability of commercial music and community run programs in the Valley. While working in a small English town, Milton Keynes, Finnegan (1989) defined musical practices on a smaller, less commercial and more everyday scale as ‘pathways’. Although not perfect for describing the music practices in the Valley, ‘pathways’ is more relevant than ‘scenes’, evoking the ‘networks’ that will be described in the Bega Valley in Chapter 4.

Such smaller everyday musical practices are important to this study because, as Finnegan (1989, p. 8) has written, studying the processes (not products) and grassroots activities and organizations, instead of those more formally structured, reveals a greater understanding and appreciation for how individuals find and create meaning from their chosen activities. Finnegan (1989) highlights the importance of studying grassroots music because, unlike in other areas of formal music production, grassroots work is not focussed on musical consumption but the processes, and practices of music making. This is a theme that will be explored later in this thesis.
Gatekeepers and cultural capital

Within ‘scenes’ and musical communities there are important players who gatekeep venues, genres and opportunities (Bourdieu 1984; Wright 2005; Negus 2010; Gallan 2012).

Gatekeepers, or ‘cultural intermediaries’, are described by Negus as people who are in places of power to connect the consumer with products (Bourdieu 1984; Negus 2010). For example Sommeliers, or wine experts, can use their knowledge to guide others in decision making.

This expertise, or cultural capital, is described by Bourdieu (1984) as being possessed in three ways: through embodiment (i.e. it is intrinsic to the mind and body’s state of being), through objects like books or photos or instruments; and through attaining formal qualification from an institution (Bourdieu 1984). In the case of music scenes, cultural capital can then be affiliated with perceived ‘discerning tastes’, professional connections, record collections, record sales, positions of power over decision making, and degrees from respected musical institutes (Bourdieu 1984). As an example of the way in which such relationships can unfold in the music industry, Ben Gallan (2012, p. 35) discussed how gatekeepers of a live music venue gave preference to “‘local’ bands socially connected to the music scene” instead of bands with already established state, or national reputations. There are therefore alternative ways of gauging social/cultural capital within music scenes. With respect to control of music practices in the Valley, as will be revealed in Chapter 4 and 5, cultural capital has been exchanged for other forms of human capital. Many gatekeepers in the Bega Valley create pathways for music upon premises other than ‘credibility’, including social need, inclusivity, and the quest for community.
2.4 Community Music and Community Groups in Rural Areas

The term ‘community music’ refers to musical practices that are grassroots, post-industrial and generated by individuals and groups out of the desire to create music, rather than make money (Breen 1994; Matarasso 1997; Rimmer 2009). Examples of community music range from orchestras and choirs to musical theatre productions. Chapter 4 will illustrate how and why community music is of importance to those who participate in musical practices in the Valley.

In the early 1980s the Regional Arts Association in the United Kingdom recognized the Association of Community Artists (a group born from grassroots artists of the 1960s) as beneficial and active in various community art programs (Rimmer 2009). With an increasing need for funding the Association of Community Artists began to re-focus its identity as one less affiliated with art production and one more concerned with community engagement (Rimmer 2009). In the 1990s Francois Matarasso (1997) authored a report (funded by a private company, Comedia) describing fifty ways that participating in community arts could help social problems, including: fighting social exclusion, promoting social cohesion, community empowerment, self-determination, local image and identity, imagination and vision and health and wellbeing. Community music was recognized as a means to enable residents to engage with their community and the arts, thus redefining their own sense of belonging to a place.

Community music endeavours are different from those of commercial music because they are not profit driven; they are based in the desire for creating music, creating community and educating community – as might be some commercial musical activities, though without the need to profit. Community music also differs in its ability to decrease the distance between music production and consumption (Negus 2010). Unlike in commercially produced music,
which is highly mediated by the recorded music industry, by paid live performances and festivals, community music is actively produced by residents, and their friends and family, whether or not there is an audience, a recording, or a payment. Community music eschews the ‘imagined identification’ (Bloomfield 1993) that commercial music instils in listeners via recorded media, and instead music is embodied and performed by those directly consuming it, within community contexts.

2.4.1 Community groups in rural areas

Because of the small population in rural areas community groups and sports teams become important for social cohesion and in providing a sense of individual and collective identity and belonging. Anything that can trigger the loss of these relationships, like a disagreement with other members, is devastating to the social life of residents (Lockie and Bourke 2001; Tonts 2005). Within rural health studies, community involvement has been encouraged as a way to circumvent further decline and to increase overall wellbeing (Berkman and Syme 1979). Berkman and Syme (1979, p. 186) found that social support systems can be crucial to an individual who has been subject to either a large social or cultural change, living conditions that are unorganized or has been affected by poverty (all of which put rural residents at risk). Their results demonstrated that individuals who lacked support through such struggles were more likely to suffer (and even die earlier) than those with friends and family who could help ease stress and provide help (Berkman and Syme 1979). Such results remain relevant to the Bega Valley, a location where isolation, economic hardship and recent arrival into unfamiliar circumstances are all commons. Art programs offer important opportunities for cultivating new relationships for long-time and newly arrived residents. With inspiration from Lucy (1997) and Spokes (2003) Rogers and Brockley (2006, pp. 56-57) wrote:
It is the arts which can reach people, move them, inspire and challenge them like no other discipline, and it is through the arts that people can become meaningfully engaged... it is the very nature of cultural activity that engages – it promotes dialogue, communications and social interaction, while breaking down old barriers and fostering relationships… the arts and cultural activity could create the environment necessary for the exchange and development of complex concepts, technical language, and the creation of new knowledge in ways which would inspire and motivate people.

Through engaging with the arts, people are able to have experiences that involve them with the community while allowing them to create/recreate and express their own identity. Smailes (2010, p. 89) found that despite not everyone joining, participation in sports teams, community clubs and special interest groups in rural areas were an important part in shaping and reinforcing community identity and belonging. Through community arts programs individuals can learn new skills, meet new people and increase their self-esteem and confidence. This thesis will later explore these themes through participation in community music programs.

An important component of community music in small towns is their ability to adapt and work within limitations, and within certain social institutions, in ways that the commercial market cannot. For example in Finnegan’s (1989) work she found that in a small town, places such as schools were important hubs for community networking and socializing with respect to music. Schools are often one of the most important places for music practice for young people in the community: as Finnegan (1989, p. 206) says, “The schools are something more than just channels to lay the foundations for ‘proper’ musical participation in later life; they are themselves organized centres of music – a real part of local musical practice”
(Finnegan 1989, p. 206). As will be seen later chapters, schools in the Valley are key places for music dissemination as well as job opportunities for local musicians qualified to teach.

In addition to individuals, communities can also benefit from social cohesion through increased feelings of trust between members (Matarasso 1997; Lockie and Bourke 2001; Mohan and Mohan 2002). Literature addressing social cohesion often uses the term ‘social capital’. Social capital is a term described by Mohan and Mohan (2002) as the ties between residents of a community formed and fed by trust and a sense of mutual reliability. Social capital is used across many disciplines but more recently has been used in discussions about rural community rejuvenation and policy development (Jones and Tonts 1995; Alston 2002; Falk and Kilpatrick 2002; Woodhouse 2006). Social capital is found to increase economic viability through the close bonds and trust between residents (Putnam 1995; Alston 2002). Some controversy surrounds the use of the term because it is virtually impossible to measure accurately, and therefore comparisons are subject to assumptions and generalisations (Mohan and Mohan 2002). For the purpose of this study Mohan’s (2002) more ethnographic interpretation of ‘social capital’ will be used in later chapters when referring to the bonds formed socially between residents within community music programs, bonds based on trust.

2.5 Music and Meaning

The following major section of this literature review outlines relevant academic research on music and choirs and their connections to place, identity, wellbeing and spirituality. These themes will be addressed in Chapter 4, in discussion of the Bega Valley’s music practices, and in Chapter 5, in a case study of the Valley’s choirs. I begin this section with general discussion of music studies before examining previous research pertaining to choirs.
2.5.1 Music, place and choirs

Music is a cultural expression, a way of building and breaking down barriers and exploring the ways in which people live and exist in a place (Smith 1997). Place and the music created within are undeniably linked. This can happen in a number of ways. For example particular sounds can be attached to acoustic traits of a building or room, or, through place marketing locations such as Tamworth can become a ‘country music capital’ (Connell and Gibson 2003; Gibson and Davidson 2004). Another way music is linked to place is through the migration of people. Musicians alter and add to musical places as they pass through them, bringing their own styles, languages, and stories (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Hollows and Milestone 1998; Connell and Gibson 2003). A popular example is the migration of the early blues players such as Muddy Waters and Little Walter who travelled up from Mississippi and Louisiana to Chicago (Hanson 2007). Upon coming to the city their musical styles changed from acoustic to electric, reflecting the changes in their surroundings (cotton fields to noisy city) (Hanson 2007). There are also lesser known, but parallel stories found in towns and cities of smaller scales (Finnegan 1989; Luckman et al. 2008). When people move to a new location and are inspired to write, sing and participate in music they may not re-write or re-invent a city’s identity (like Chicago Blues) but they will leave an imprint – a new definition of a space in time through their music. Chapters 4 and 5 seek to show how this might be the case for the Bega Valley.

Choirs and place

One of the aims of this thesis is to emphasise place in studies of choirs. There is a substantial literature on choirs (and on singing in choirs) and their numerous benefits to health and wellbeing (Hays 2005; Laukka 2006; Silber 2007; Sandgren 2009; Clift and Hancox 2010). Research on choirs, identity, and emotion has also been conducted (Clift and Hancox 2001;
Richards and Durrant 2003; Bailey and Davidson 2005; Durrant 2005). Where the literature is especially lacking is an acknowledgement of the importance of place with respect to the benefits of choirs. A typical treatment of place is in the work of Faulkner and Davidson (2006), an otherwise engaging analysis of an all-male choir, which only mentions in passing that the group is formed in a rural area and that this is potentially a reason for the diversity in the choir members. For all the merits of Faulkner and Davidson’s research (2006), they delve no further into the ways in which the choir has brought rural men together or how the place has shaped experiences in the choir. Likewise work by Smith (1999) on children’s choirs in Victoria, Australia, assessed the difference in goals and parental participation between 16 different choirs. The study analysed the aspects of choir emphasized in the groups (recreation, education or performance). Questions asked of parents in surveys ranged from how their children got to rehearsals to what they wanted their children to learn from the experience. Surprisingly there was no consideration of how transportation to and from choir would have varied depending on location in Victoria or the availability of public transportation.

Other ways place can impact choirs is through population size. Bega Valley choir directors have a small population to recruit from and because of this there are rarely auditions. As a result, similar choirs in rural areas need to manage voices of different strengths and their emphasis is often on being an inclusive group who sings together within a community. Certainly in cities choirs can require more than one audition (Dougherty and Hedden 2006). This could equate to more intimidated community members not even considering participation. Such luxuries of choice are rarely open to rural choir directors. Rural choirs do well to attract enough regular participants to survive; as a result their priorities shift and sociality and skill development become incredibly important.
Place can dictate the composition of people in the choir, the number of people who can come to rehearsal, the type of choir (example, mixed gender and genre of music) and their performance capabilities and possibilities. It can also shape the role of the choir. As will be seen in later chapters, choirs in the Bega Valley are crucial to the wellbeing of many members and play meaningful roles in the self-identity of choristers. These qualities are not, of course, unique to rural areas: urban choristers might well also enjoy their social dimensions and construct self-identity through choral singing. Nevertheless, such functions are, we shall see, magnified by circumstances particular to rural locations. Without the context of the place in which a choir exists it is impossible to fully grasp all their full significance.

2.5.2 Music, Choirs and Identity

In Chapter 1, identity was defined as a socially and culturally constructed perception of oneself, formed through actions and the remembering of those actions. Music can influence and become part of self-identity. Frith (1996, p. 120.) states that identity is an ‘experiential process most vividly grasped as music’. Identity is understood as a process, fluid and unfixed, which is governed by social and cultural influences (Giddens, 1991). One of these influences is music. Music can help create spatial, collective and individual identities (Finnegan 1989; Frith 1996; Cohen 1995; Bennett 2000; Connell and Gibson 2003; Whiteley et al. 2004 Duffy and Waitt 2010). Spatial identities are created when regions are identified with certain sounds, like the ‘Dixieland’ jazz of New Orleans, or the special acoustic traits of certain recording studios, like Motown, or Stax (Connell and Gibson 2003). There is nothing approaching this level of distinctiveness emanating from the Bega Valley, nevertheless, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, important to this thesis are collective and individual identities.
Examples of where music has been used to construct a collective identity in Australia include where country and Aboriginal music have been vital to understandings of a national identity (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004). Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004) explain that through the telling of historical tales of people and places in Aboriginal music, a collective identity was (re)created. Collective identities provide a sense of belonging (as well as possibilities for exclusion of others), for those who actively participate in their creation (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1995; Duffy and Waitt 2010). In Chapters 4 and 5, feelings of collective identity and belonging are revealed in the discussions with community music participants in the Bega Valley.

With respect to individual identities, music can be used as a means to help paint a certain persona (Frith 1996; Hargreaves and North 1999; Bennett 2000; DeNora 2000). Expressing a love of punk or heavy metal can for instance position the fan as rebellious or anti-establishment (Bennet 2000; DeNora 2000). Music can be used as a way to create and perform an identity; while through time such process, practices and affiliations with music can change (Bennett 2000; DeNora 2006; Wood et al. 2007; Rudd 2009). The actions which express self-identity are important but so too is the remembering of actions.

*Memories, music and self-identity*

Memories are important for self-identity and music can be a valuable tool in reconnecting with memories (DeNora 2006; Rudd 2009). Consider what happens when you listen to a song that has emotional meaning for you. Smells, textures and particular emotions attached to the time and space when the song became meaningful surface themselves. In addition, a certain understanding of self is revealed from such memories (DeNora 2006). Memories attached to music are powerful because as the song plays it permits the memory to unfold and the emotions and the atmosphere felt in the past are re-experienced (DeNora 2000, 2006; Rudd
DeNora (2000, p. 141) says that: “music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is”. She describes music as a tool in retrieving and creating memories of who one was, or still is (cf. DeNora 2000; Connell and Gibson 2004; Rudd 2009). Listening to music from our past can help us relive moments when we had a particular lifestyle for which we may feel nostalgic. Yet, as Hesmondhalgh (2008) suggests, such memories can also misguide the listener into remembering a time that did not exist. Through listening and performance, music is able to provide an extra dimension when reliving a past experience, or aesthetic self – something that photos and words cannot (cf. Connell and Gibson 2004; Rudd 2009). This practice of reliving past experiences and aesthetic selves through music will be explored later in this thesis in relation to singing in choirs (Chapter 5).

Choirs and self-identity

Choirs are mediums through which people express collective and/or self-identity (Richards and Durrant 2003; Faulkner and Davidson 2006). National identity, a collective identity, can be expressed and created through choirs. Scicong and Southcott (2012) studied choirs composed of elderly Chinese migrants in Australia. They explored the ability of choristers to express a common identity and share national pride with other members of their home country, resulting in decreased feelings of isolation (Scicong and Southcott 2012). Joseph’s (2007) work on South African choirs in Australia revealed similar findings. Choirs ameliorated isolation and promoted multiculturalism through education and celebration of diversity (Joseph 2007). Work by Reigersberg (2009) explored how Aboriginal people in Australia used choir singing as a way in which to navigate their own identity within the context of a modern Australia. Each of these examples show both a collective identity, in the
form of national identity, but also self-identity, as each member self-identifies as an immigrant (and a choir singer) within a multicultural context.

Richards and Durrant (2003) found that through learning new skills, good supportive direction, practice and the resulting increase in self-confidence even those who self-identified as ‘non-singers’ could change their opinion and see themselves as ‘singers’. Through coming together and singing songs, choirs can promote collective identities and provide individuals with a place of belonging through increasing their sense of a collective and individual identity. Exactly how this plays out in the Bega Valley is the subject of Chapter 5.

Masculinity, self-identity and choirs

Harrison’s (2009) work on choir singing documented feelings of belonging and safety among young Australian males who participated in choirs during primary and into high school years. Hall (2009, p.17) explains, ‘the single-sex choir has been described as a sanctuary for adolescent boys; a place of refuge where they can feel safe to explore their most authentic selves without fear of reprisal’. In a country where masculinity is attached to playing sports, drinking beer, and working on farms, choir singing offers an alternative way of engaging with masculinity (Harrison 2009; Rickwood 2009). Rickwood’s work (2009) on the rise of the Spooky Men’s Group, an all-male choir, illustrates how such groups have opened up new stories and histories for old and young Australian men to draw upon as they negotiate, and re-evaluate their identities. This is a theme addressed in Chapter 5 with respect to male gender roles in rural Australia and men’s participation in choirs.

Despite all of these important ways of analyzing choirs, it must be reiterated that none thus far have addressed the importance of the particulars of place. This thesis will track parallel
themes of identity, expression and belonging, but also attempt to fill this gap on the
significance of place.

2.5.3 Music, choirs and wellbeing

Music and choir singing have been linked to an increased sense of wellbeing. This is
important with respect to Bega Valley choir members who, as predominantly older rural
residents, are at risk to feelings of isolation and health issues related to ageing. Lukka (2007)
explores wellbeing through feelings of life satisfaction and overall happiness. Understandings
of ‘wellbeing’ move beyond the realms of biological health and include consideration of
psychological health and overall happiness.

Physical benefits to singing and music practice

Music is able to influence emotions, moods and an individual’s sense of identity and because
of this, music can directly impact a person’s overall sense of wellbeing. Evidence of this can
be seen in the use of music therapy where patients enjoy increased movement or pleasure
from participating in music practices (Rudd 1997; Snyder 1999; Stacey et al. 2002; Burns et
al. 2007). Music therapy exercises typically involve listening and sometimes playing rhythms
with percussion instruments (Snyder 1997; Burns et al. 2007). Burns et al. (2007) found that
such activities have been found to reduce anxiety and tension through measurable decreases
in cortisol secretion in cancer patients.

Stacy et al. (2002) explored singing for health and wellbeing. Alzheimer’s patients were
found to have better social, cognitive and emotional skills when music was part of their
routines (Stacey et al. 2002). In addition, music practices were seen to increase relaxation and
decrease anxiety in sufferers of depression and a range of mental and physical illnesses (Ruud
1997; Stacey et al. 2002; Cohen et al. 2006; Burns et al. 2007). Singing increases exercise in
muscles of the neck and core of the body that are not normally worked (Hancox 2001; Stacey et al. 2002). It has been found that the necessary breathing control, including deep breathing, increases oxygenation of the blood and its flow through the body, therefore increasing energy levels (Stacey 2002; Cohen et al. 2006; Clift and Hancox 2010). Other physical or biological benefits from choir singing are changes in body chemistry. The American National Association of Choirs released a report with findings that participating in choir singing released endorphins which could reduce feelings of pain (Stacey 2002). Beck et al. (1999) discovered an increase in immunoglobulin-A secretion as well as fluctuations in cortisone levels during choir rehearsals and performances. As a result, emotions experienced from singing included ‘highs’, stress and relaxation as well as pleasure felt from performing well (Sloboda 1991; Clift and Hancox 2001; Bailey and Davidson 2003). I explore these possibilities in Chapter 5.

A related theme is the embodiment of music. An individuals’ relationship with music can manifest in both the mind and the body (North and Hargreaves 1997). Those aspects shown through the body are what Wood et al (2007, p. 868) called the ‘non-representational components’ of music, or those elements that are ‘embodied’. Sloboda (1991), North and Hargreaves (1997) and DeNora (2000) all point to connections between music, emotions and bodily affects. Spine-tingling, emotional highs, tears – those indescribable musical connections – are affective responses from the body towards, and inflicted by, music (Kreutz et al. 2008; Salinpoor 2009). Probyn writes of such reactions as innate responses that the body uses to ‘amplify at a psychological level the stimuli of everyday life’ (Probyn 2004, p. 329). Music proves to be one such stimulus.

Music can also initiate physical responses by connecting rhythmically to listeners. An example of this is illustrated in work by Pacchetti et al. (2000), who found that music therapy
increased the happiness, quality of life and motor skills of people diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. Although helpful for understanding the chemical and mechanical impacts of singing on the body the vocabulary used within discussions of the embodiment of music (such as ‘high’) resonates more closely with that used by choristers in this study, than purely scientific/biological explanations.

Social and mental benefits to choir singing and music participation

For individuals who are physically or mentally isolated from their surroundings, like in the Bega Valley, choir singing and other musical practices can offer an array of physical and mental benefits. Louhivuori et al. (2005, p. 89) found that the main reasons for people in their study participating in choirs were the social and emotional aspects: “the message is straightforward: personal relationships between choir members are more important than relationships among other kinds of groups”. Choir participants felt comfortable having personal discussions about family, relationships and spirituality with other choir members (Louhivuori et al. 2005). Hay and Minichiello (2005) and Cohen et al. (2006) found that elderly involved in choirs experienced decreased feelings of loneliness and the social interactions increased their self-esteem.

Individuals are not the only ones to benefit from collective programs. Communities can also benefit from community music programs. Langston and Barrett (2008) found that choir singing could increase social capital in a community by creating stronger bonds between choristers (community members), increasing individual self-esteem, increasing physical and mental well-being of participants and by increasing the creative outlets available for community members. Such themes will be discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the comparison of benefits from community and commercial music.
An individual’s gender, social class, ethnicity, age, history and place of residence can all influence perceived benefits from participating in music practices. Bailey and Davidson (2005) compared the benefits of choir singing for a group of homeless men with no music/singing education and a group of middle class men with low to high levels of music education. Emotional effects of participating in group singing were similar for both choirs but the homeless men’s choir engaged more openly, gaining higher benefits from social interactions and skill development. Bailey and Davidson (2005) concluded that middle class men were constrained by their perceived need to be more proficient at singing.

Grape and Sandgren (2003) found differences in the experience of amateur and professional singers during group singing practices. Both groups experienced the release of oxytocin but only the amateurs felt this through an increased sense of joy. Amateurs also cited their participation in choir as a time for expression of emotional stress and a time for self-actualization. Although they also had an increase in oxytocin the professionals did not feel the increase in joy. Their performances at rehearsals were goal-oriented, towards trying to attain a certain level within their singing. Professionals did however have an increase concentration in TNF-alpha which equates to an increase in feelings of arousal (Grape and Sandgren 2003). Depending on an individual’s musical education and their goal orientation they may experience more or less elevation in wellbeing within a choir performance.

Work by Sandgren (2009) and Clift and Hancox (2010) showed that women were much more likely than men to perceive benefits to their overall wellbeing from choir singing. Both studies were careful to note that reasons why women expressed higher states of wellbeing after a rehearsal is still unknown. Clift and Hancox (2010) have hypothesized that perhaps
men are more engaged in the social aspects of choir rather than artistic expression. This theme reappears here, in Chapter 5.

2.5.4 Music, emotions and the soul

Everything parents don’t want you to get into as a teenager – that’s what you could hear in John Lee Hooker’s voice. It was seductive as it was foreboding. Pain, defiance, anger – all those emotions were so acute with John Lee, and that’s what draws us to the blues (Bonnie Raitt, quoted in Lethem 2008).

Work pertaining to music and emotions has examined emotions attached to memories (DeNora 2000), the indescribable embodied reactions like goose-bumps (North and Hargreaves 1997) and amongst others, the perceived ability for music to transcend what words are incapable of expressing, somehow revealing deeper thoughts (Bloomfield 1993). Music can instil emotions in an individual through its tones and rhythms or through memories associated with it. Because of these emotional ties music is often affiliated with the indescribable, the spirit or soul.

Music is a language of the emotions (Finnegan 2003), but emotions are intertwined with culture. Because of this they can be influenced and responses conditioned. With this in mind, I consider other interactions between music and emotions. For example the assumed need to lose inhibition to sing aloud with others, or the shame/embarrassment felt when someone is told their singing voice is terrible (Austin 2001; Chong 2010). Later it will be revealed that such emotions shape how people can benefit from music participation.
Inhibition, shame and embarrassment

To dance in a nightclub, to perform music or even just to sing in a group, individuals generally need to lose some sense of their inhibition (Straw 1999). This can happen more easily in certain spaces, like dance clubs, where the resulting actions are socially accepted and expected (Straw 1991). With respect to singing there tends to be a very narrow idea of what are acceptable voices (Lomax 1968, 1977). Alan Lomax (1968) pointed to the radio as an instrument of mass communication of music that narrowed people’s perception of good voices. People thought if, when singing themselves, they did not sound like those they heard on the radio, then their voices were bad. Like highland dancing in a nightclub, should a church choir member open their mouth and emit something quite different from expectations (think of the nasal voice of Neil Young, for instance), this would be considered ‘out of place’ and the actor marginalized, or potentially asked to leave the group (Chong 2010). Chong (2010) described how in music therapy one of the initial and most difficult stages was to get patients to lose inhibition and allow themselves to sing aloud.

Embarrassment caused by shame of the sound of a singing voice can cripple an individual’s ability to sing in a group. Bridges (2009) tells of adults who were reluctant to join a choir because they identified themselves as poor singers from negative experiences in school groups. Participants in the study described having been told by their parents, teachers and other adults that their voices were unfit for singing (Bridges 2009). A combination of socially constructed ideas of ‘good voices’ and negative past experiences shapes an individual’s ability to participate, or enjoy, the activity of singing (Chong 2010). Participants in this study shared similar stories of negative experiences and feelings of shame and embarrassment with respect to their singing voices (Chapter 5).
The soul

Since the rise of Romanticism Western society has been largely preoccupied with ideas that music is an ‘authentic’ way in which the emotions are expressed – that playing music or singing is a way in which to connect most deeply with another person, as if music removes the need for context, or stories to understand what a musician is saying (Bloomfield 1993; Finnegan 2003). Whether music is a true representation of emotions felt by an artist is not the focus of this thesis. What is important is that within interviews of choir members and musicians, music and singing were connected to ideas of the soul and spirit.

Work by Hays and Minichiello (2008) and Clift (2010) found that participants cited ‘spiritual benefits’ from choir singing. Choirs have been long affiliated with churches as a form of group worship and collective identity (Sanger 1997). According to Sanger (1997, p. 187), civil rights protestors would ‘turn to songs when speech fell short’. Their songs would increase the sense of spirituality within the group. Her participants spoke of protests songs as ‘expressions from the ‘spirit’ or the ‘souls’ of the singers” (Sanger 1997, p. 190). Protest songs from the civil rights movement often spawned from church gospel songs and because of this there is a direct connection between the songs sung and the spirituality attached to them through choral participation. In a world that is becoming increasingly secular, choir singing, according to Walter (1992), can offer ways of singing through anxieties about the intangibles like death and the afterlife. Such themes also surface in Chapter 5.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has worked through a wide span of literature relevant to this thesis. The chapter introduced some of rural Australia’s most pressing social issues, as a backdrop to understanding the ways in which community programs, especially creative ones, can offer
solace and improved sociability. Meanwhile, conceptions of creativity have emerged in regional development literature that have become dominated by neoliberal logics, consequently marginalizing grassroots forms of creativity, and those non-market forms of creativity that emerge in rural areas, where markets are insufficient to meet needs for cultural amenity and meaning. This thesis focuses on community music as a type of creativity that catalyses communities and contributes to wellbeing in a non-commercial manner. Insufficient public infrastructure and low average incomes decreases rural mobility and limits possibilities for professional arts and cultural audience development. When combined with the characteristic out-migration of friends and family from rural areas, limited mobility and little disposable income can lead to decreased participation in paid arts programs and performances, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and depression. In what follows, I explore community music programs to ascertain whether they offer increased opportunities for socializing and physical and mental wellbeing. Music related programs promise benefits through teaching new skills and encouraging creative expression. Music practices are said to engage individuals with their own skills and sense-of-self as well as a community in which they can feel they belong. How this might be so is explored in the remainder of this thesis, with special emphasis on the role of place in making music communities, and mediating community music.
Chapter 3

Methods

This research implemented the qualitative methodologies of observation, semi-structured interviews and ‘vox pop’ interviews. Relationships and interactions with music and music practises, even in a group, can be a very personal experience. Recruitment of participants was sought through advertisements and ‘snowballing’ to engage with a range of community members. Semi-structured interviews gave participants opportunities to express their individual experiences and stories. Carefully worded ‘vox pop’ questions allowed participants in community music programs to describe personal experiences, with little burden or imposition on their time. A narrative approach to analysis focussed on the meanings and relationships described by participants. And finally, in-situ observations allowed for the rounding out of the story by filling gaps left by interviews.

3.1 Observation

Through observations an ethnographer “gains unreplicable insight through analysis of everyday activities and symbolic constructions” (Herbert, 2000, p. 551). Participant observation can be key to unveiling details that may seem unimportant or irrelevant to participants (Shurmer-Smith 2002). That being said, observations are most effective when used in conjunction with other methods, such as interviews (Jackson 1983). Such a combination allows for more well-rounded results. Throughout the literature participant observation is often divided into four categories such as: ‘participant’, ‘observer’, ‘participant as observer’ and ‘observer as participant’ (Gold 1958 cited in Jackson 1983).
During the field work portion of this research I moved to the Bega Valley for a three month period (December 2011 to March 2012) preceded and followed by a few shorter trips. As a young Canadian student I had no preconceptions about my own role being an ‘observer as participant’. I was only in the region for a short time, I have an obvious accent and, although hopefully not obvious, a sometimes poor understanding of Australian slang. Where I could most adequately perform the role of ‘observer as participant’ was in explaining my motivations. My rural background gave me insight and an ability to relate to the residents in a way an urban researcher might have struggled with. I have an innate appreciation of the small size of social networks in a small town, and the feelings of isolation that can become overwhelming for incoming, and existing residents. I found too that telling participants I was from a small town sparked interest and often made interviewees more relaxed. I do not feel as if my position as ‘observer as participant’ was in any way limiting. I believe that people were interested in contributing and helping me, and because of this, opened up quickly about their passion for music. Despite my own obvious differences from the community, after three months in the field I was able to say hello to familiar faces, accept invitations to concerts and freely exchange phone numbers and emails with new friends.

During my own introduction to music in the Bega Valley observations were key in determining potential areas of interest and finding people to interview. While attending music venues observations were made on the amount and types of participation, the number of people who attended shows and how often venues put on live music. Within my work on choirs of the region observations were vital, to detail things that people did not feel were important to verbalise in interviews, or that my questions did not incite them to divulge. For example during one rehearsal I attended there was an announcement for choir participants to gather at a sick member’s home to help rebuild her much loved garden. When interviewed none of the participants spoke of this type of social support as one of the benefits to being in
a choir, yet it was obviously a meaningful role the group played. Other important insights were gathered through observation of the interactions of individuals with music. Emotional responses to music and the physical act of singing can both be difficult to describe and understand. Through observations emotional responses were sensed (Scherer and Zentner 2001). A good example of this was the experience of watching the members of one choir during a moment of silence after singing a Taizé chant, *In God Alone*. The way each member savoured the moment was demonstrably unique, solitary and powerful; something that would have been difficult to describe. Observations generated leads and rounded out the story of music in the Valley.

*Recording observations*

To record my observations I used three methods: a journal, audio recordings and photographs. Each method offered different forms of recording that were more or less useful in different contexts. I wrote in my field journal after and before interviews and choir rehearsals, making note of gestures, attitudes and reactions I felt were interesting and important. The journal provided an inconspicuous and organized place to relay my thoughts. During shows I made note of the average perceived age and approximate number of audience members. At choir rehearsals I tried to make note of relationships and dynamics within the group as well as the emotion shown by members while singing. A few times I found it easier, due to time constraints, to record my thoughts using an audio recording device. These I later transcribed to text. Lastly I used photographs as a way of showing the landscape of the Valley and towns, and participation during festivals and shows. Photographs were helpful in giving context to places in which journal observations were recorded and offered an opportunity to revisit locations and events at a later date.
3.2 Recruitment of Participants for Interviews

My intention at the beginning of the study was to recruit the majority of participants for interviews using posters and advertisements. I had also decided to target venue owners, musical directors and avid music scene participants through phone calls and emails. This combination was intended to collect interviews from music fans (listeners and musicians) and those who supported the major venues and spaces. After a less than impressive reaction to posters I turned to ‘snowballing’ as a way for finding new participants. Snowballing is a means of connecting with potential participants through existing ones (Hay 2005). Study participants will often be connected to others in the community with similar interests (Hay 2005). This was a smooth transition in approach; those participants who had already volunteered, or accepted my invitation, had already offered names, and often numbers, of others they thought would be interested in participating. In addition to this ‘snowballing’ I was also able to meet new people who were keen to participate at choir rehearsals, music festivals and local gigs.

In all, 28 people were interviewed or were recorded in vox-pop interviews. The majority of the 28 were over the age of 40, female, and of Anglo-Australian decent (with the exception of one Aboriginal participant) (Table 3.1). This limits this study to only being able to discuss conclusions surrounding how this particular demographic used music in the Valley as a means to attaining a sense of self, belonging and wellbeing.
Table 3.1:  Summary of participant information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age, Sex</th>
<th>Music related role in the Valley</th>
<th>Method of Participation in Study &amp; Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>40s, M</td>
<td>Musician, director &amp; educator</td>
<td>Interview at his home &amp; email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerry</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Interview at Café &amp; email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacy</td>
<td>40s, F</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Phone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>20s, M</td>
<td>Musician, educator</td>
<td>Interview at Café &amp; email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>30s, M</td>
<td>Music fan, &amp; director</td>
<td>Interview at a park in Bega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Fan, Arts Society member</td>
<td>Interview at his home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>50s, F</td>
<td>Works at local music school</td>
<td>Interview in music shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>20s, F</td>
<td>Musician, key player in local festival</td>
<td>Interview at her workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>In person interview at local café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>30s, F</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>Email exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Venue owner</td>
<td>Interview at venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Director, musician, educator</td>
<td>Interview at local café &amp; email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Arts council member</td>
<td>Interview at his office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>50s, F</td>
<td>Musician, educator, choir member</td>
<td>Interview, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakob</td>
<td>40s, M</td>
<td>Musician, director</td>
<td>Interview at his home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>50s, M</td>
<td>Festival volunteer/ organizer</td>
<td>Interview at local Cafè</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>50s, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Phone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle</td>
<td>40s, F</td>
<td>Musician, director</td>
<td>Interview at local café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>50s, F</td>
<td>Musician, director</td>
<td>Interview at her café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>40s, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Phone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>73, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>61, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
<td>75, M</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbeth</td>
<td>60s, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>68, M</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>57, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>40s, F</td>
<td>Choir member</td>
<td>Vox pop, community centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Interviews

There were two different types of interviews: semi structured, which lasted between 30-90 minutes; and a sequence of ’vox pop’ interviews, usually lasting 10-20 minutes, where only three questions were asked. Interviews were chosen over surveys because as Shumer-Smith argued, they are useful for showing individual experiences and they: “expose differences, contradictions and, in short, the complexity of unique experiences” (2002, p. 151). Semi-structured interviews allow for a more personal and flexible conversation between the participant and the researcher (Hay 2005). In this study it was important for the conversation and questions to be malleable because participants had multiple and varying roles and experiences with music in the Valley. Although the format of the interviews encouraged re-telling of any music related experience it cannot be overlooked that participants likely censored themselves and shared with me, a researcher, only what they felt comfortable.

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study allowed participants to share their own stories and experiences while answering a few core questions of interest. For example one of the questions of interest was the duration of time participants had lived in the Valley. This allowed me to gauge whether participants engaged/perceived the music in the Valley differently depending on their time living in the region. This question was sometimes used as an opening question to initiate dialogue or it was asked in an appropriate moment during a participant’s narration.

The primary goal of using more open-format interviews was to encourage individuals to reveal what they felt was important about their interactions with music in the Valley – through their chosen stories. Participants spoke of music through the friendships they had made, passion and pride for towns they lived in, and the ever evolving relationships with
themselves and their own identity. Semi-structured interviews formed the medium for these stories and relationships to be expressed.

Valentine (1999) argued that the location of interviews can change their quality and outcome. This was taken into consideration by allowing locations to be chosen by participants. Locations chosen varied from places of work to local cafés and homes (see Table 3.1). The only obvious difference between interviews conducted at homes and those in cafés was that at cafés participants were, arguably, slightly more distracted. They sometimes lost their train of thought and often interviews were interrupted by friends of the participants.

A small number of interviews were conducted over the phone because of distance and time constraints of participants. There was a notable difference in the dialogue exchanged during in-person interviews and those conducted over the phone. Interviews over the phone were often shorter and were more difficult to stimulate free flowing thoughts and reflections. Such interviews required more structured approaches with specific questions to prompt discussion.

In addition, two interviews were conducted via email at the request of participants. One had been after an in-person interview was cut short and email was decided to be a better form of communication due to a busy schedule. The other was a similarly busy resident. In this latter circumstance no questions were posed. I simply asked the participant to share their ‘music story’. I was then forwarded a lengthy and well written recount of the participant’s relationship with music throughout their life.

‘Vox Pop’ interviews

In addition to the semi-structured interviews a ‘vox pop’ style session of interviews was conducted before a choir rehearsal (see Table 3.1). The reason for changing tactics and moving to a ‘vox pop’ style was: 1. a hypothesis that an on the spot ‘vox pop’ would gather
more participants than longer and more intimidating/time consuming interviews; and 2. an increasingly focussed interest in why it was that people were so passionate about participating in choirs in the Valley. Vox-pop interviews could be gained quickly, and with little time burden on participants.

Vox-pop interviews are predominantly used by journalists and researchers conducting polls or seeking short, quick answers. But Gibson et al. (2012) described their use of a vox-pop interview in a way to enable a greater spontaneity and freedom in the amount of detail participants could offer for answers to questions. For them this sometimes meant limited or truncated responses; at other times it allowed for more complete and complex thoughts to be relayed (Gibson et al. 2012). Gibson et al. (2012) emphasised that in vox-pop interviews the wording questions must be crafted carefully to encourage people to respond openly and engagingly. Short and punchy questions were the key. I attempted to achieve this through similarly short and punchy questions.

There were 3 questions I asked to each participant in vox-pop interviews with choristers:

1. How long have you been in the Valley?

2. What do you like best about being in a choir?

3. Why sacred choral music?

As stated previously, duration of time in the Valley was of interest throughout the study. With questions 2 and 3 an effort was made to allow for participants to answer in whatever way they felt natural. For example, for question 3, some commented on their apprehension to singing in a sacred choral choir while others described their lifelong passion for it. More people from within choirs were interested in participating in the short interviews than to
commit to lengthy sit-down interviews, and were excited to discuss some of the reasons behind their passion for choir singing. Vox pop’ participants were recruited through contacts already made with one choir director and a choir member. ‘Vox pop’ interviews were conducted before a choir rehearsal in a community hall, connected to the church/ rehearsal space, where many members of that particular choir share dinner. Most were conducted individually at a separate table from the group but a few were done in a group setting at the request of participants. These interviews drew out spontaneous and passionate responses from participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed for more drawn out stories of the individual’s engagement and history with, music and choir singing.

3.4 Data and Analysis

Interviews (both semi-structured and ‘vox pop’) were recorded using an audio recording device and were later transcribed verbatim into text. These texts and the email responses were analyzed using a narrative approach. During analysis notes from the field journal that had been made about the interview were incorporated. Notes allowed for a better and more rounded understanding of the interview at a later date.

The transcribed interviews and email texts were then coded by themes and analyzed. A narrative approach to this analysis meant that themes of interest were those pertaining to the way in which relationships, interactions and events related to music were described. Narrative analysis is based on the assumption that we organize experiences and form understandings of our surroundings through ‘interactive talk’ (Willes et al 2005, p. 90). There are various approaches to narrative analysis but for this study I focused on the deeper meanings revealed through the participants re-telling of stories through relationships and their own understandings of these connections (Willes et al. 2005). By looking closely at a participant’s narrative of their interactions with music, unspoken meanings and perceived connections
between them were revealed. For example, when choristers spoke of singing in a choir their chosen stories about either having personal time (away from family obligations), learning to sing or enjoying the social interactions helped highlight what they felt were the more important aspects of choir singing.

As for the actual coding of the themes, Seale (2004) discussed an approach to coding that he equated with indexing, as in compiling sections of transcripts into themes that would be found at the back of a book. This was my approach. He also argued that there were two streams of themes to be coded: the deductive and the inductive (Seale 2004). The deductive codes are those determined by the researcher; for example I wanted to look at how new residents versus longer term residents felt towards music in the Bega Valley (Seale 2004). The inductive themes are those that the research itself uncovers. An example of this was the different roles of choirs in the Valley and their importance to participants. Themes were chosen/ uncovered and coded by sifting through transcripts and highlighting reoccurring, and independent, words, experiences and ways of expressing relationships, connections and emotions related to music practices. After themes were labelled they were grouped into larger sections of more manageable data. These manageable sized groups of data were then combined and linked in order to write up the findings into two main results chapters. It is to these chapters we now turn.
Chapter 4

Making Music in a Small Town: What Happens When the Commercial Market Fails?

The Bega Valley may seem a peculiar place in which to study, or enjoy, locally created and performed music. For most Australians, the Valley is better known for its iconic Bega brand cheese, not its music. This chapter’s primary aim is to introduce the reader to the Bega Valley, to the music found there, and to the obstacles that shape music making in the region. Remote areas in Australia have limited accessibility when it comes to enjoying and creating live (and recorded) music. Large distances between towns and little public transportation mean an over-reliance on private motor vehicles, which not everyone can afford. A small, and seasonally fluctuating, population places pressures on music venue managers to balance between offering gigs to local musicians versus bringing in new acts for the region’s listeners. For these reasons, the region’s music practices are not dictated by popular venues, bands or particular record shops that often define an urban ‘scene’ or commercial music space. Instead, issues of accessibility and a small dispersed population have combined with passionate music fans, to trigger a community driven to create their own music, through grassroots creativity, and as a result have filled the void that the commercial market has failed to fill.

Community-run music in the Bega Valley is supported by art societies and a core group of directors and music fans. Schools (public and private) along with professionals offering lessons, provide a diverse and reasonably accessible way for individuals to engage with a variety of musical genres and local productions. Festivals offer the region’s musicians important performance opportunities, and places to listen to and meet national and
international artists. Grassroots productions and groups are not impermeable to issues surrounding mobility, or critical mass, and they struggle with funding. Nevertheless, the music fans of the Bega Valley continue to carve out new ways of playing and listening to music through festivals, community productions and a drive to create high quality music.

4.1 Welcome to the Bega Valley, NSW, Australia

The Bega Valley is located on the far south coast of New South Wales, Australia (see Figure 4.1). The Valley is comprised of 6,000 square kilometres of fertile farm land (see Figure 4.2) stretching from 106 kilometres of South Pacific coastline, to the foothills of Australia’s Great Dividing Range (home of the Snowy Mountains). The Valley is 425 kilometres from Sydney, 607 kilometres from Melbourne and 230 kilometres from Canberra. With no linking rail lines, and barely passable road connections, coastal shipping access, was the primary means for early Bega Valley settlers to trade with the larger port of Sydney.

Until the 1830s the Valley was inhabited solely by the tribal groups of the Yuin-Monaro Indigenous Nation (McKeena 2002). It was during the 1830s that European colonists arrived and began clearing land for farming (McKeena 2002). Farms were a mix of grazing herds of sheep and cattle, grain crops and dairy farming (Bayley 1987). Due to a growing popularity in the latter, in 1899 a butter factory cooperative was established in the town of Bega (Bayley 1987). From this factory came the nationally acclaimed Bega Cheese, in 1954 (Bayley 1987). In addition to cheese production, the area’s economy was also heavily reliant on forestry and for a period, whaling in the town of Eden (Evans 2010). Today the economy is still dependent on forestry and dairying but has also expanded into tourism. Beaches, whale watching, surfing, and charter fishing are all popular attractions that draw visitors during the summer months.
Figure 4.1: Towns of the Bega Valley Shire, NSW, Australia.
**Figure 4.2:** View of farmland from the Bega Valley Lookout, Bega, NSW, Australia

**Figure 4.3:** View of Tathra Wharf, a popular fishing spot, and surfers from beach, Tathra, NSW, Australia
Major settlements of the Valley include Bega (population 4,536), an inland town which is the seat of local government and associated services, alongside major retail chain stores, banks and the region’s hospital. The coastal towns of Merimbula (3,851) and Bermagui (1,298) are centres for entertainment and along with the smaller towns of Tathra (1,622) (see Figure 4.3), Pambula (1,146) and Tura Beach (2,740), play host to many of the region’s tourists over summer holidays (Bega Valley Shire Council 2009). All of the region’s population centres are small; none could be called a city, and even the largest settlements barely constitute ‘towns’ as many residents of larger places might recognise them.

Today the region is dominated by retirees and families. With a population just over 30,000 the average density is only 4.6 people per square kilometre (Bega Valley Shire Council 2009). Residents between the ages of 15-40 remain underrepresented and the region’s median age, calculated after the 2006 census, was 45 years (Bega Valley Shire Council 2009).
This was 3 years older than the median age calculated in 2001 (Bega Valley Shire Council 2009). This ageing population profile is typical of most rural and regional areas in Australia (refer to Chapter 2) (Argent and Walmsley 2008; Connell and McManus 2011). The trend reflects youth out-migration for employment or higher education in larger cities and the in-migration of retirees (Argent and Walmsley 2008; Gorman-Murray et al. 2008; Connell and McManus 2011).

Countering out-migration has been a limited stream of in-migration. A first wave of in-migration to the region occurred during the 1970s when a small population seeking an alternative lifestyle moved to the Valley. The newly arrived migrants brought an infusion of visual arts, writing, music and other forms of creativity (Swinbourne and Winters 2001). The chosen areas of settlement were Tanja (population 381), Candelo (population 339, see Figure 4.4) and Wyndham (population 610) all of which today still boast artistic presences, despite their diminutive status (Swinbourne and Winters 2001; Bega Valley Shire Council 2009). Swinborne and Winters (2001) outlined some conflicts that occurred between in-migrants and the existing population. One topic that they did not agree on was the deforestation of nearby rainforest for the economic gains. Most long-term residents had grown accustomed to the large trucks and the unfortunate removal of Koala habitat. Forestry had always been one of the region’s sources of income. Many of the new migrants had more progressive environmental beliefs and saw the forest as something to preserve (Swinbourne and Winters, 2001). Today, through music, the region’s artists still protest against old-growth logging\(^1\).

The Bega Valley is indicative of Australian rural changes brought on by government restructuring and sea/tree change migrations (Argent and Walmsley 2008; Gorman-Murray et al. 2008; Connell and McManus 2011). Yet it is also made unique by rich landscapes,

\(^1\) For examples of this see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_qYP_J4neA & http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GN628pMB3U8&feature=relmfu
farmland and people. A small population and geographically dispersed towns make travelling across the region difficult and living there isolating. However, as will be demonstrated here, through music residents have found ways to engage with each other and are passionate and proud about living in the Valley. Most participants in this project were from the coastal towns of Tathra, Merimbula, Bermagui, the inland towns of Bega, Cobargo (population 426) and Candelo, with some from Wolumla (population 380), Pambula, Wyndham and Tanja.

4.2 Enjoying Music in the Valley: the Key Stakeholders

Live commercial music in the Valley is dominantly acoustic and electric folk, blues and rock. There is however a strong classical music fan base which supports the Four Winds Festival (a classical music festival, see 4.7.2) and similar shows throughout the year. There are a few key stakeholders with respect to the more commercial side of performing and listening to live music in the Valley. This section will introduce: 1. the Arts Societies and community organisations who are important for organizing events for fans and opportunities for local musicians to perform; 2. the venues that provide live music throughout the year; and 3. a private music school which offers music lessons for students and employment for teaching musicians. This information will help give context for why, and how, the Valley’s music practices exist as they do.

4.2.1 Arts societies and community organizations

Arts societies in the Valley provide social outlets for the musically inclined and performance opportunities for local established and aspiring musicians. They range from award-winning youth production company, Momentum Music, to the popular and well-established Candelo Arts Society. Activities range from monthly bush dances to special events such as the fundraiser for East African famine relief which was held in Candelo during the summer of
2012. Most events tend to focus on local talent but for larger shows, and in the case of the fundraiser, musicians from outside the Valley also perform. Shows hosted by such groups range from formal sit-down intimate shows to more rowdy dances and jam nights. Genres range from folk and country, blues, spoken work and classical to rock and roll. As for jam nights types of music are dictated by who and what instruments are in the audience. Table 4.1 summarizes the larger music-related organisations. All groups, except South East Arts, require annual memberships which provide reduced ticket prices and regular club updates. The societies listed are those who most often host or help organize music events, but in addition, there are also choir groups (see Chapter 5), orchestras and small ensembles in which members participate actively in musical performances. Such performances are hosted both by the larger art societies and the groups themselves.
**Table 4.1:** Arts Societies, Bega Valley, NSW, Australia, 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Popular events/ Specialities</th>
<th>website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South East Arts</td>
<td>Based in Bega</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Support body for all types of arts programs and initiatives in the Valley. Example of their work is in helping new initiatives apply for grant money.</td>
<td><a href="http://southeastarts.org.au/">http://southeastarts.org.au/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Candelo Arts Society | Candelo       | 150+              | Monthly: dances and music & variety nights.  
Annual: special concerts and performances from local and visiting artists.  
Organize the Candelo Village Festival every second year | http://thebegavalley.org.au/cas.html       |
| Yuin Folk Club       | Cobargo       | 200+              | Annually: special concerts and performances from local and visiting artists. As well, they organize the Cobargo Folk Festival. | http://www.cobargofolkfestival.com/page/comingevents/ |
| Momentum Music       | Bega          | 20+               | Annually: host all-ages concerts. Also help put on productions through the year for CAS and other organisations. | http://www.facebook.com/pages/Momentum-Music-Media/14561805879030 |
The Candelo Arts Society is one of the longest running groups, having operated for twenty-six years. Larry, Candelo resident and spokesperson for the Society, explained:

We have acoustic circles and sometimes we just do half local people and then we have a feature act where someone comes and performs for us. Coming up we have a ‘Bird Night’ which is bird calling or bird poems... it’s very varied [laughs]. Then every second year for the past 5 years... we’ve had festivals... the first Saturday of the month we have a bush dance at Kameruka [Hall] and then the third Friday of the month we have an MandV (music and variety) night (Interview 2012).

The Candelo Arts Society offers a variety of events that are a good way for new residents to meet the community. Larry described moving to Candelo with his wife and how the Arts Society introduced them to other music fans from town:

The community is so good here and if you have a slight interest in music you go along and they’re very willing to accept you... we didn’t know anybody when we came here. And joining groups, especially the Arts Society, we’ve met heaps of people. So it’s been really good. I’ve always enjoyed music and going to gigs and what have you. So it was a bonus to be able to just walk across the bridge and get to see some great acts (Interview 2012).

Arts Societies provide a medium for local music fans to meet new people, listen to local and touring musicians and opportunities for musicians to perform. Arts Societies are also key to the organisation of the Valley’s music festivals (see section 4.7.1 below).
4.2.2 Venues

Within the Valley there are a few key locations where locals can listen to live music (see Table 4.2). Arts Societies generally use town halls, bowling clubs and local cafes or hotels as venues for their events. Each town in the Valley has a town hall with a capacity of about 200 which the organisations can rent from the Shire council. Venues for live music are dominated by bars, cafes and clubs. Table 4.2 outlines the key venues from Bermagui to Pambula that provide live music most Friday and Saturday nights throughout all or part of the year. As it shows, the small local population places limits on the availability of live music. However, during the tourist season (summer months), cafes and clubs put on more frequent live shows to cater to the larger population. The Tathra Hotel for example hosts live music in the summer months, or a DJ, up to four days a week, including Sunday afternoon blues shows.

The venues that were mentioned most by participants in this study were the Tathra Hotel, Café Evolve, and the Same Same Café as well as the various halls. This may be attributed to the fact that many participants were from Bega, Tathra and Candelo.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Typical Events</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Bank Hotel</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>Bar, rock groups</td>
<td>90 (sitting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Commercial</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grand</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>Bar</td>
<td>80 (sitting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Evolve</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>Café and restaurant, singer songwriters and small groups</td>
<td>30 (sitting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Rock Café</td>
<td>Bermagui</td>
<td>Live music during the simmer months</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Same Café</td>
<td>Candelo</td>
<td>Open during the summer months for small shows</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candeloo Town Hall</td>
<td>Candelo</td>
<td>Used by CAS* and for larger events</td>
<td>200 (sitting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candeloo Bowling Club</td>
<td>Candelo</td>
<td>Used by CAS for monthly shows</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kameruka Hall</td>
<td>Candeloo/ Kameruka</td>
<td>Used by CAS for bush dances monthly</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobargo Bistro Hotel</td>
<td>Cobargo</td>
<td>Frequently hosts live music</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Sapphire</td>
<td>Merimbula</td>
<td>Local and touring musicians in summer and winter</td>
<td>500 standing, 320 sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeky Mango Cafe</td>
<td>Merimbula</td>
<td>Live shows weekly</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ’s Cantina</td>
<td>Merimbula</td>
<td>Live shows weekly in summer</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Willows</td>
<td>Pambula</td>
<td>Live shows weekly</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanja Town Hall</td>
<td>Tanja</td>
<td>Used for live shows with large audiences</td>
<td>294 (licensed capacity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tathra Hotel</td>
<td>Tathra</td>
<td>Live music weekly</td>
<td>350 event room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tathra Bowling Club</td>
<td>Tathra</td>
<td>Live music weekly</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tathra Town Hall</td>
<td>Tathra</td>
<td>Used for live shows with large audiences</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolumla Town Hall</td>
<td>Wolumla</td>
<td>Used for live shows with large audiences</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolumla Hotel</td>
<td>Wolumla</td>
<td>Ad hoc live music</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘CAS’ = Candeloo Arts Society.
Figure 4.5: Café Evolve from Carp Street, Bega NSW. Photo Courtesy of Chris Brennan-Horley.

*Café Evolve*

Café Evolve is on the main street (Carp Street) of Bega (see Figure 4.5). During the summer months (December to March) live music is put on most Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights and on an ad hoc basis during the winter months. The Café’s shows finish by 10pm and are predominantly blues, country, or folk, performed by soloists or small groups (see Figure 4.6). The Café is an important live music venue in Bega as it is one of only a few alternative night spaces from the working class country pubs that dominate the town (de Jong 2011). All ages are welcome at shows.
The Tathra Hotel

The Tathra Hotel is open year-round and is located on a picturesque edge of land overlooking the ocean. The Tathra Hotel was once a very popular music venue. Tyler, a member of the Hotel management, said: “it used to be a music venue in the 1970s and 1980s. It was very well known. People used to travel a long way, you know from Canberra, to see big rock bands like Cold Chisel and Icehouse, Men at Work. They all played here you know, middle of nowhere” (Interview 2012). After rowdy New Year’s parties left Tathra covered in glass, local authorities, and some residents, became unhappy at the Hotel’s big party events, and
they began to be heavily policed. Increasingly poor attendance at shows, and some say bad management, resulted in the Tathra Hotel’s decline. The Hotel was sold in 2011 and is currently under new management. With an interest in promoting live music, the venue has undergone a rejuvenation much appreciated by the area’s music lovers. During the summer music is put on up to four nights a week. The venue has a main bar, where most smaller and acoustic acts play and a large event room for bigger shows (capacity is 350). Both areas offer places to sit and watch or get up and dance to the performing act. The Tathra Hotel hosts both local and touring bands (see Figure 4.7). In 2012 artists from as far away as Canada and Ireland played at the Tathra Hotel on their Australian tours. Genres of music played range from acoustic one man show blues acts, like Canadian Matt Andersen to popular hip hop acts as Tyler described:

We had Elli, the hip hop, Triple J Hip hop Act. That was over 300 people. Then Mental as Anything, one of the old rock bands that used to be here, and that was a big hit (Interview 2012).

From hip hop to country and from Canada to Candelo, the Tathra Hotel hosts a variety of music for locals to enjoy. In 2012 the Hotel also hosted the Tathra Summer Music Festival after the town council declined the festival’s use of the beach.
Figure 4.7: Pete Wild, prominent local keyboardist/performer plays here with Candelo based band, Heath Cullen and the 45s, at the Tathra Hotel, Tathra, NSW, Australia.

The Same Same Café

Although quite small and only open seasonally, the Same Same Café in Candelo hosts intimate shows on market day mornings and other small jam nights on an ad hoc basis through the summer (see Figure 4.8). Larry described: “this weekend at the Markets the Same Same Café is reopened again and the usual suspects - Pete Wild, Sam Martin, Mike Martin are going to be playing Jazz in the morning” (Interview 2012). The Café is a quintessential Candelo venue as local musicians often play impromptu shows when friends and instruments are available. It can be equated to a sort of musical watering hole for locals versus a venue
focussed on income from shows. Often times there are more listeners on the sidewalk chatting and swinging to the music than there are inside the Café. Candelo is a particularly musical and artistic community. As mentioned previously Candelo saw an influx of ‘hippies’ and alternative lifestyle seeking urban migrants in the 1970s which has fostered this strong collection of artists.

Figure 4.8: Same Same Café, Candelo, NSW, Australia
Town halls

Town Halls are hired as music venues by societies and organisations when they host larger events. For example the Candelo Town Hall and the Kameruka Hall are two venues used by the Candelo Arts Society. Kameruka Hall is found on an Estate of the same name just outside of Candelo and is used for the monthly bush dances. Candelo Town Hall (see Figure 4.9) is used for the Art Societies’ larger shows, like Heath Cullen’s (a local musician) 2012 album fundraiser.

4.2.3 Music Schools

In a time when funding for primary and high school arts programs are at a minimum, the role of music schools and professional teachers who provide lessons is increasingly important. The most well-known music school is Magpie School of Music, in Bega, which is attached to
a retail store of a similar name: Magpie Music (see Figure 4.10 and 4.11). One of the school’s owners, Liz, describes the school’s size and specialties:

The school of music has approximately 300 students that go through each week. We have 11 teaching studios and 20 teachers... A lot of the kids will go on to do tertiary music studies, However there are lots of opportunities for kids who just want to learn the guitar without the extra stress of writing exams. But we do have teachers here that can take them all the way through [the musical grades]... So it’s quite a diversity of students... We have nearly everything covered now except bagpipes, we have a flute teacher starting this year, sax, clarinet, trumpet (Interview 2012).

This music school is also a place of employment for Valley musicians who wish to teach their skills to others (see section 4.5.1 below).

Figure 4.10: Magpie School of Music and shop from Auckland Street, Bega, NSW.
4.2.4 Radio stations, production equipment and recording studios

Within the Valley there are six community and ABC operated local radio stations: ABC radio South East, Amateur Radio Lighthouse Society, East Coast Radio, Edge FM Community Radio Bega, Edge FM Community Radio Eden, and Power FM South East. Stations offer links to national and international music and news along with information on local gigs. For example when more popular acts come to the region they often are interviewed on one or more of the stations (usually Edge FM) for publicity purposes.
Magpie Music, M.O.O. Music in Pambula, Eden Music Centre in Eden and local recording studio, Pirate Studios, located just outside of Merimbula, are the only places in the region to rent equipment for live performances (such as microphones, amplifiers and stage lights). In addition to renting equipment, Pirate Studios is also the area’s only commercially advertised recording studio.

The music communities that are formed by the art societies, venues, schools and other businesses are similar in format to those in urban areas – firmly part of the market (or in the case of public schools, the government institutional system). However, as the following section will show, the small dispersed population and the isolation of the Valley force music practices in a direction away from those typical in larger urban centres – as musicians struggle to maintain a commercial ‘scene’.

4.3 The Bega Valley Commercial Music ‘Scene’

Despite the passionately run arts societies, the venues, the music schools, radio stations and small businesses, the Bega Valley does not have what is understood in metropolitan areas as a music ‘scene’ – a sense of allegiance to a genre or subculture, a critical mass of music-makers and loyal audiences, or intense networks of people enmeshed in proximate relationships and dependencies (Chapter 2). The main reasons for this are: 1. limited performance opportunities available for local musicians; 2. venue owners struggling to balance between giving gigs to local acts and travelling bands to keep listeners happy; 3. musicians having to compete with a demand for DJs by younger residents; and 4. the combination of the lack of public transport and people’s reluctance to combine driving at night and drinking alcohol, limiting audiences’ abilities to commute between towns. This section will elaborate on each factor and how they inhibit a commercial music scene from forming. The way Bega Valley musicians cope with this market failure will also be discussed.
In most metropolitan music ‘scenes’ professional musicians are often able to play shows regularly in their area and get paid (even if payments are low). Musicians who live in the Bega Valley must find alternative ways of making an income to the traditional ‘gigging’ circuit. Kyle, a young Bega blues musician, described the situation in town:

The lack of gigs and the lack of a music scene, as well as a general lack of interest from punters [customers] in the area, especially young people, often makes me frustrated, and looking for opportunities elsewhere (Interview 2012).

Bega is the commercial and administrative heart of the Valley, yet it lacks a reliable circuit of venues for local musicians to play regularly. For young musicians to get practice and exposure, playing shows is considered necessary. Ideally, local musicians would have a range of venues in which to play and hone their act. Yet Jeff, a music director of a Bega venue explained the difficulty with booking local acts too frequently:

We’ve tried a lot of local [musical content] but what I’ve found with the local performers is that initially, the first time they play, generally, they draw a lot of people but... I try not to book them more than twice in three months. I try and stretch it out a bit and each time they’re getting less and less [audience members]. They couldn't really sustain an interest on a regular basis. So we’re trying now to get people in, more high profile performers (Interview 2012).

Jeff highlighted one of the curses of playing music as part of a market-driven scene in any small town: over exposure is inevitable. The market, like in all areas, drives a perennial desire in local venue owners to bring in outside talent from the cities to encourage better attendance.
at shows. Musicians are forced to look at other towns in the Valley, and larger capital cities, for regular performance opportunities.

Fortunately for Valley musicians, an increase in the region’s tourist population during the summer months provides more opportunities for playing, and being paid (cf. Gibson and Connell 2003). Local musicians get work opening for larger acts and for smaller afternoon shows, which simply do not exist in the winter months. Kyle said: “over the summer period, I am more likely to get offers to play a full three hour show with just me playing, especially at the Tathra Beach Bowling Club, and outdoor gigs” (Interview 2012). Such opportunities are, however, limited to the coastal towns – especially Tathra, Merimbula and Bermagui.

Accessibility to shows is another major factor mitigating audience attendance at gigs. For young people, limitations on liquor licences and a need for transportation often limit their ability to attend shows unless carpooling can be arranged. Venues may also come with stigmas of undesirable fellow patrons – musicians struggling to attract crowds to pubs or clubs that have bad reputations as ‘rough’, ‘drinking barns’ or ‘pick-up joints’ (de Jong 2011). But for the majority of residents the key issue affecting attendance at local shows is mobility. According to Kyle,

> It is very hard to get a following in this area, due to the lack of interest in live music, and people’s unwillingness to travel from town to town to see music. People from Bega are unlikely to travel to Eden to see a gig (Interview 2012).

Although some commute between towns for education and work, when it comes to entertainment residents generally stay within their own towns. Tyler explained, “you know, it’s 20 kilometres to Merimbula and 18 kilometres to Bega and so if people want to come out for the night and have a few drinks they’re not gonna – they can’t drive” (Interview 2012). Each town has its own Hall, most have cafes (some seasonal), and an RSL club, pub or hotel
of some sort. For a relaxed night out residents will generally stay within walking distance – or a feasible cab/shuttle bus ride home. Although these circumstances may not be unique to a rural area they are nevertheless amplified, and are compounded by the small populations in each of the Valley’s scattered towns, villages and hamlets, which constrain audience size within walkable distance.

For musicians who persist and wish to play locally, DJs are another obstacle. DJ nights are a direct competitor to local live music in the Valley. Kyle explained: “In Bega, DJs will get more gigs than musicians, because the young people will be more inclined to go to the pub to listen to the latest hits, and electronic music” (Interview 2012). Tyler, a venue owner in the coastal town of Tathra, also explained that “the young guys have asked me a couple of times to bring in DJs so they can have a dance and I’ve done that” (Interview 2012; cf. de Jong 2011).

De Jong’s (2011) research on young women going out in the Bega Valley found that venues were attached to imagined geographies shaped by personal experiences and those had by family and friends. These imagined geographies inhibited the development of a commercial music scene within the available venues. For example Café Evolve was seen as a place dominated by an ‘alternative’ culture; some young women felt as though they needed to be ‘different’ to fit in (de Jong 2011). In addition, de Jong (2011) found that for young women in the Valley going out at night was a means of performing either a ‘conservative country femininity’ or a ‘sexy metropolitan club femininity’. The ‘conservative country femininity’ was embraced by women who felt they should managed their alcohol consumption and dress nicely, but more casual (de Jong 2011). A ‘sexy metropolitan club femininity’ focussed on drinking and dancing to dictate the evening (de Jong 2011). Although dancing can occur at live music shows, clubs mentioned by participants in de Jong’s work, like the Lakeview
Hotel in Merimbula, were venues who frequently booked DJs instead of live music (de Jong 2011).

Despite difficulties for musicians and venue owners, there are opportunities to enjoy live music throughout most of the year. Michael, who moved to the Valley about two years ago, said:

> Since I’ve come down to Bega the Café [Evolve] here has started a music program that happened nicely. They have quite an active music scene here so I am often down during the week or certainly weekends. There’s usually something on… it’s very diverse and really active for a small little community. See, I came out of Adelaide, a big city, a million people, and there’s plenty of music there, so I wondered when I came here what it would be like – and I was very pleasantly surprised in the breadth and the depth of it (Interview 2012).

Nevertheless, for those hoping to make money the small dispersed population, with little or no access to public transportation, fails to provide a market for local commercial music.

One outcome of this is that a coherent music ‘scene’ never quite coalesces. Production and consumption of music is extremely limited in the Valley simply by the total number of possible audience members. ‘Scenes’ also often assume relationships between actors being cultivated by music-related organisations, and preferences for particular styles (Cohen 1999). In the Valley, fans and musicians are more often linked by geographies of proximity, places of employment and family ties. As discussed in Chapter 2, an alternative way to describe the Valley’s musical practices is Finnegan’s metaphor of ‘pathways’, however it tends to denote linear and equal access to other actors, which the Valley’s physical geography makes impossible (Finnegan 1989). There is a nonlinear nature to the relationships and interactions which occur among musicians and audiences in the Bega Valley. There are hubs and nodes to
the networks – towns like Candelo and Bermagui – but also fragmentations and disconnections (cf. Gibson 2002b). In the case of Candelo its affiliated arts society (the Candelo Arts Society) provides many possibilities for connections. The most accurate metaphor to describe the area’s music ties is multiple overlapping networks, because being geographically dispersed, musicians tend to stay close to their homes, as do audience members. The loosely-defined networks are nowhere significant enough commercially to warrant the moniker ‘scene’. That is not to say that music is rare, or an unimportant concern for Bega Valley residents. Musical activities across the Valley embrace the mixing of styles, genres and skills – folk musicians, classically-trained instrumentalists, inspiring blues musicians, and choirs. Even if nowhere there are the commercial opportunities substantive enough to support an intense live music scene, the Bega Valley’s music practices nevertheless reveal themselves, not in the form of a ‘scene’, but in an abundance of grassroots music production and community participation. From a willingness, and desire, to share and involve residents in musical activities a core of individuals have carved out the real heart of the Valley’s musical identity: community music.

4.4 Making Community Music

Community music is an approach to creating music, one fostered by the desire not to make money but to inspire, teach and create with others. It is active and inclusive. In the Valley, programs and groups have been born out of a desire to create music in an area that cannot support a commercial market. The ‘cultural activities’ of these groups are not economically oriented, rather they have come into existence for their own sake, for the desire to engage and create music. As will be seen in Chapter 5 these groups also give participants an increased sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing in an area that can be socially, mentally and physically isolating. This section introduces the people who have initiated community
programs and groups; give examples of the types of community music in the Valley and outline a few key differences between commercial scenes and community music practices.

4.4.1 A ‘need to generate’: what music lovers do when a commercial ‘scene’ fails to materialise

A group of musicians and directors organize and run community music programs in the Valley. Nick described: “You find that it’s the same bunch of teachers that are doing it all. There’s five or six of us just sort of handling all the groups” (Interview 2012). Directors often have more than one group for which they are responsible. For example, Geoffrey Badger, a professionally trained musician who moved to the Valley over 20 years ago, is in charge of two choirs and the Bega Valley Chamber Orchestra. Arts Societies are also very important for putting on productions, and providing opportunities for performance, and enjoyment of local music. This group of musicians, and music fans, has found themselves in an area with a very limited commercial music market, which has forced them to generate their own programs and activities.

Geoffrey described what the Valley was like when he moved there:

There wasn’t much going on actually back then. If I wanted to be involved in say, I really love sacred choral music, and if I wanted to participate in that then I had to actually generate it. I had to make it happen (Interview 2012).

Steve, a youth music coordinator, spoke of a similar experience:

I moved up here from Melbourne and I used to run some night clubs and dance parties and sort of festivals and things down there. When I came up here there was a real gap. It started off for me going, ‘I need somewhere to dance’. I had a small circle of
friends and we started trying to get something going and we quickly realized that really the only people in the Shire that were into dance music, which is what our focus was then, were the younger people. But their focus, and their understanding of the culture, was really lacking. It was really, not so much drug driven... it was just that really young mentality where they don’t understand the broader cultural concepts behind it (Interview 2012).

Moving to the Valley, for music fans like Geoffrey and Steve, has meant that they are pushed to create different types of music then they would have in larger cities. Jeff explained: “you haven’t got as many opportunities in a way, but you’ve got different types of opportunities as well. You have the freedom to do things here that you probably can’t do in Melbourne or Sydney. Or Canberra” (Interview 2012; cf. Gibson et al. 2010). Geoffrey agreed with Jeff and said “the interesting thing is that I have done more music here than most of my counterparts in the city and probably had more fun doing it” (Interview 2012). The music programs may be started from a desire of one person to find outlets for their musical interests but they consequently enrich the lives of many other community members.

Those who participate in community music programs vary in age from 15 year olds playing in the Youth Orchestra to 60 and 80 year olds playing in brass bands and singing in choirs. As for the younger participants, Geoffrey said it is: “the same bunch of students, actually, the kids who are really into orchestra are also dancing at fLinG [physical theatre company]. They’re the kids who are switched on to doing things outside of school already” (Interview 2012). Programs are open to everyone who wants to participate. However, as will be seen in section 4.5.1 getting to rehearsals between family and work can prove to be difficult.
4.4.2 Examples of Bega Valley community music, and its participants

In the Valley community music engages musicians and theatre actors. The types of community music in the Valley includes larger productions, like Marriage of Figaro put on by the Sapphire Coast Music Society in 2011, and the 2011 concerts by participants of Four Winds Festival ‘Inspiring’ program (see Box 4.1). Genres of music are predominantly classical and folk with instruments ranging from cellos to ukuleles. Larger productions are predominantly focussed on acting but local musicians find roles, singing, writing music and playing instruments. For example Awake, a popular 2008 production by fLinG’s, a well established Bega based dance company, included music composed by locals, Geoffrey Badger and Pete Wilde and performed by local musicians. Geoffrey described the production and its success:

We’ve done a lot of collaborative stuff, like we will do live music and contemporary dance… We’ve had quite famous Australian contemporary dance choreographers and educators come and just go ‘wow, this is the best original dance company in the country!’ And it’s just happening down in the basketball stadium in Bega (Interview 2012).

Large instrumental ensembles include groups such as the Bega Brass Band, Bega Valley Chamber Orchestra and the Sapphire Coast Concert Band. Smaller instrumental groups are both formal and informal. An example of a formal group (they have released a CD and tour) is Guitarama, a group of guitar players who play predominantly Latin music. Informal groups are more like what Jane, a Candelo musician, described:

[a local musician] has started a beginners group in the school for any adult who wants to learn an instrument And so it’s a band, and the only provisory is that you don’t play
something you are already good at. Lots of musicians join to learn a new instrument.

It is a huge role model to the children (Interview 2012).

Community music in this instance is truly about just giving people a chance to learn an instrument.

**Box 4.1 ‘Inspiring’ – a Four Winds Initiative**

The ‘Inspiring’ program is a joint initiative of Four Winds Festival (an event also discussed in Section 4.7.2 below), and South East Arts. It aims to involve local schools in music.

Natalya Tacheci, a member of the board, explained the premise of the 2011 program:

> Our inspiring program we did last year, was a partnership with the Sydney Children’s Choir… we commissioned a new piece by Dan Walker. He came into the area a few times, to get to know the children and the area and from that drew the inspiration. [He then] did workshops with the children and did a professional development day with the teachers (Interview 2012).

Once the piece was learned, schools from across the Valley participated in concerts:

> In Bega we partnered with Southeast Arts and… the Children’s choir to put on the performance there. In Moruya, the public school really got into the program in a lovely way so we put a concert on at that school… (Natalya, Interview 2012).

The connection established between the schools and local musicians formed during the ‘Inspiring’ program continued after the program finished:

> And out of that Dan [Scoally] was asked back to Bermagui Public School to keep the choir going (Interview 2012).
The Inspiring program brought together musicians and children from outside and within the Valley to create and perform pieces inspired by the Valley and the children there. The concerts were for all community members, not just parents of the singers.

Community music is also found outside of specific groups and productions. Events such as bush dances (see Figure 4.12) and the ‘Music and Variety’ nights put on by the Candelo Arts Society, offer an opportunity for aspiring musicians, and people who just love playing music to express themselves. It also gives fans a place to socialize, dance and relax.

[They] can range from two people turn[ing] up to an acoustic circle at the Town Hall to a full out packed house of dozens and dozens of people having a great time. Even two people, it’s still a great night because someone’s expressing themselves with their music (Larry, Interview 2012).

Whether the venue is full or not does not matter to musicians who create community music for its own sake. When economics are not driving an event, people are able to just enjoy playing their music. In an interview for The Australian Candelo musician Heath Cullen said he started playing music at a Candelo Arts Society’s open mic night. Cullen said of the Society: “it’s a very supportive atmosphere, everyone is encouraging and joins in” (quoted in Shedden 2012). The essence of the Valley’s community programs are not captured in their repertoire, or membership numbers, but in their approach, and enjoyment, in the creation of quality music.
4.4.3 Community versus Commercially Produced Music

A lack of a commercial market can paradoxically broaden musicians’ opportunities. As per the arts scenes described by Bourdieu (1984), which can be equated to a commercial music ‘scene’, there are key gatekeepers with cultural capital who mediate paid performance opportunities. When musicians play, or work with, such gatekeepers, they are enabled, through gaining cultural capital themselves, to play with and work with more accomplished or famous, musicians and producers (Bourdieu 1984; Brennan-Horley 2007). Prestige and reputation are not, however, the only factors mediating access to musical performance opportunities. In Gallan’s (2012) research on the Oxford Tavern live music venue in Wollongong, booking agents deliberately chose local bands to play over better known (and probably better sounding) bands from Sydney and Melbourne, because of a strong ethos of...
‘localism’ that overrode commercial concerns. In the Bega Valley, where the focus tends to fall on music creation not economic gains, the criteria for musical and creative trust and control are quite different again. As Nick, a choir director and educator, explained:

The interesting thing is in Sydney or Canberra or Melbourne people are really interested in your CV and who you’ve worked with and all that sort of stuff. Whereas here they just really want to know what kind of person you are and once they realize you’re a good bloke then you get all the support you can imagine (Interview 2012).

In the Valley, the traits that make up a person’s character, honesty and reliability, are seen as more important credentials than having played previously with accomplished musicians. Being part of music in the Valley is about collaboration, hard work and good conduct, not necessarily who you know or have previously worked with. Nick explained other benefits of community-produced music in comparison to commercially-run productions:

It’s so different to pull it all together yourself here for the players we’ve got and there’s so much we all have to learn… [it] generates a lot of community interest, community learning… [G]oodwill and connections happen through just one project like that and to me that’s just so much more valuable than a performance put on by people that are paid and paid for by the listeners who sit there passively. It’s quite a different thing to do actually, community music. I’m kind of addicted to it, and I think because there’s that element of real honesty about it… it cuts out the distance between audience and performer (Interview 2012).

Nick highlighted a key difference between community and commercial music – the breakdown of the performer-listener barrier. This barrier usually acts as means to separate listeners from understanding the processes of production and creation of the music they are
enjoying (Bloomfield 1993; Negus 2010). Community music requires active participation by those people who might otherwise be in the audience. In so doing it opens up participation in creative expression, through singing, playing an instrument and acting. Individuals are able to better understand the process of musical performance and integrate themselves directly into the event. The final product is not something which sells tickets because it is world renowned, but because cast members and writers are talented collaborators, friends and family members of the audience.

Although community music has filled the void left by the absence of a viable commercial music scene, it is constrained by the same factors (geography, population and accessibility). Arguably, community music programs are more limited than one-off commercial shows and gigs by population size and mobility. Funding, accessibility, geography and a small population all challenge the ability for choirs and ensembles to remain viable and perform. Nevertheless, through support from the local and national music community, a group of resilient and passionate residents have found ways to adapt and continue to perform and enjoy new work. As Nick said: “I can make things happen if I put my mind to it, so you know, anything I have wanted to do I have been able to do” (Interview 2012). Within community music there are still power relations and gatekeepers – chosen directors and coordinators control the majority of musical productions – but there is also an ‘all hands on deck’ mentality, with many groups and productions consisting of non-auditioning volunteers.
4.5 Accessibility, Mobility and Critical Mass: Running Music Programs in the Valley

Mobility and a small population limit residents’ abilities to participate in community groups and productions. This chapter will now turn to discussing these limiting factors in more detail.

4.5.1 Mobility: travelling country roads

As with commercial music, mobility is a huge influence on enjoying or participating in community music programs and productions in the Valley. Driving at night is hazardous on twisting unlit roads, and in the Valley there is a high risk of hitting wildlife (see Figure 4.13). People of all age groups, especially those who are older, rarely venture out after dark. Doug, a Valley resident, said of travelling to both community events and venue shows: “there’s music going on at the Hotel in Tathra, and the Cafe [Evolve] in Bega but I don’t drive at night. Well I might go if there’s a special event but there’s just too many ‘roos’” (Interview 2012).
Mary, a member of a Bermagui based choir, described how she waited for a local choir to be established, so that she would not have to travel across the Valley for rehearsals: “I just love to sing and I was waiting for a local choir because I didn’t want to travel. I waited 12 years to get one nearby” (Interview 2012). The limitations put on residents by the need to travel prevent them from participating in community groups and attending local gigs.

With larger distances between towns, directors and participants in the valley found themselves spending a lot of time in their vehicles. Suzanne, a Bega Valley choir director, educator and band member, described the travel necessary to teach all of her classes and groups, and participate in her own band:

I have a rehearsal tonight [in Bega] and yesterday I went to Bermagui for the rehearsal and that’s about 40mins there and back. And tonight I am going to
Wolumla and that’s 15mins down the highway then I got to drive back here [Bega] and then to Brogo which is another 20 mins. And you know all those things take up your time and your money (Interview 2012).

Travelling between places is not uniquely a rural musician’s problem, but when combined with no alternative public transportation options, it severely decreases the accessibility of performances for directors like Suzanne. Driving from town to town is dangerous (especially at night), time consuming and costly.

Like Suzanne, participants find themselves in similar situations and look for others to share petrol and the drive. Jesse, a Cobargo resident and member of a choir in Bega, said: “I tend to just work until five to seven [rehearsal starts at 8pm] and then come here, so it makes it quite a long day. But I live in Cobargo and so a few of us live there and we carpool” (Interview 2012). Despite the need to rush to choir after work, residents like Jesse felt that it was worth the effort: “With work on Monday night’s music is not very convenient but I have just made it a priority now because I wanted to have singing in my life” (Interview 2012).

In addition to their own travel, local choir directors also struggle with balancing bus timetables and travel times between towns, to gauge the best chance to attract the largest number of participants at rehearsals. A Bega choir director, Nick, explained,

The biggest problem is the distance… this time of year I am thinking okay, I am going to do orchestra this day, Monday afternoon, and choir’s going to be on Thursday afternoon. The bus comes in from Pambula at 4:15pm so I have to have my rehearsal at 4:20pm. It’s all related to when you might be able to get people here because you can’t rely on parents to just drive and there’s no public transport. So just getting people together is really quite a difficult thing. I find that in my discussions
with creative artists across the country that is the big problem... apart from getting paid, it is also just getting bums on seats for activities (Interview 2012).

Nick has to pick days and times carefully in order to increase the accessibility of his programs for students who have working parents and need to travel larger distances. This relates to another challenge with running community music programs in rural areas: critical mass.

4.5.2 Critical mass

One effect of having a small population from which to draw participants is critical mass, as Nick explained: “there’s an element of sort of engaging with everybody and putting out the feelers to get everybody you possibly can; and even those who can’t play you just say ‘no worries, come along!’ [laughs] You know it’s like you just gotta go ‘yes, yes, yes’” (Interview 2012). The inclusion of all those who are interested is a contrast to most children’s choirs and youth orchestras in larger cities, which hold auditions and recruit members for particular roles. This was described by Jessica, a local musician and director:

For public school children [in Sydney] there are a variety of orchestras… to help them reach that standard. Or wind groups or whatever, there’s huge numbers of ensembles they can belong to weekly… or even on a more frequent basis. But down here we don’t have the funds for that. Then on top of that we also have the issue of critical mass because they’ve got 300 string players that they can choose from and they can audition and have graded ensembles, whereas we’re lucky if we can get enough people, period (Interview 2012).
Despite the fact that Bega Valley directors were not able to choose from a large population for the best players for each role, there was still a desire to achieve the very best possible.

Nick explained his own perseverance to achieve the high standards:

I take the artistry seriously too. I want them to perform well and my vision is a very, very high standard. And I think that’s really important that I am not saying ‘oh yeah, whatever they can manage is okay’ I am always pushing them for very high standards (Interview 2012).

Although the Valley’s population can only support a few groups at any one time, those that do exist tend to generate musicians who are confident and have opportunities to play in community programs throughout the year. Nick commented on the difference in what he sees in the Bega Valley students and his own experiences growing up in a larger city:

I was going to see stuff [professional music] that was just coming through all the time but I always thought of myself as an observer. Like they were really good and I would never be that good. But the kids don’t have that [down in Bega] they come out of playing in the Bega Orchestra thinking they’ve played in the best orchestra. [laughing]... but you know as long as they feel it’s been exciting and rewarding (Interview 2012).

Nick’s drive for high quality music has subsequently caught the attention of people outside of the Valley:

Then they [Bega Valley music students] go off, and you know the number of kids from here to go off into tertiary music is incredible for our population. The ANU [Australian National University] have tried to force links with us down here simply because we give them so many students. And they wanna know why, ‘what’s going
on?’, You know… so it’s good; it’s been successful. I think it’s been a really good thing to do [community orchestra]” (Nick, Interview 2012).

The focus on quality, confidence building, and enjoyment of music making has created a healthy population of aspiring musicians and dancers that a market-oriented commercial music ‘scene’, focused on the pub live music circuit, arguably might not have produced.

4.6 Educational Institutions and Music: Magpie Music, and the Role of Public and Private School Music Programs

In an area with a small market for private music lessons, schools become very important for connecting music lovers, providing places for professionals to work and as venues to educate children about music. Schools are also used as venues for community productions, and rehearsals.

4.6.1 Magpie Music

Magpie Music, introduced above (Section 4.2.3), is the largest privately run music school in the region. In larger cities the influence of such a school in the actual community (musical and otherwise, see Figure 4.14) may be limited to those directly involved in the school. Although there are people who cannot afford to take lessons and are thus excluded from this institution, in Bega, Magpie Music offers a way for local musicians, including community music directors to make a living and ultimately remain in the Valley.
Magpie Music supports music in schools and community events of all types. Liz, one of shop/school owners, described:

   Our personal ethos is that we have a sense of community... you will probably find that we support everything [laughs]... For example we support the Cobargo Folk Festival, the Candelo Village Festival. All the schools in this area up to Narooma get music awards... to bring a sense of value into the school curriculum (Interview 2012).

In addition Magpie provides spaces for rehearsals and performances for their students. Liz said:
We’ve been doing ‘live in the shop’ on Saturday mornings. The students come in and perform and we mike it up and put it on outside [the shop]. From that, two boys who play guitar met and they’ve formed a duo… we [also] do get a lot of kids [who] ask us for [rehearsal] space upstairs [and] so we… provide them with a venue to practice in… it’s another thing we try and do (Interview 2012).

To support local musicians, both established and aspiring, Magpie Music also encourages people to buy local music, and to attend local shows. Liz continued:

From the perspective of the shop all the students and the teachers get discounts, which is a way for us to encourage people to shop locally and keep everything local… we support all the local bands… we do the gig guide [weekly, published in the Bega Valley District Newspaper] which is free advertising for them as well… all local performers have CDs here on consignment in the shop which is a sort of free advertising for them. We support all the local venues too (Interview 2012).

Teachers at Magpie are all local musicians, many of whom went through Magpie Music when they were learning: “The majority of the teachers are musicians themselves and so that gives them a source of income other than gigs and that’s really important to us because it supports the community music as well” (Liz, Interview 2012).

A local musician, Kyle, said of his experiences with Magpie:

I think it has definitely added to my quality of life [playing music]. It is very rewarding being able to teach music to young people, and to see their progress. I obviously enjoy playing music, and the social aspect of it is also great. I’ve met many people over the years, and these people ultimately help each other out with music. Through Magpie Music, I’ve been taught guitar, taught guitar myself, and through
many years of being involved with the owners of Magpie Music, we both help each other out with promoting things which is great. For example, I’ve bought heaps of music gear from there so I will tell other musicians where I got my stuff from so they will also buy from there and in return the owners of Magpie Music sell my CDs and look out for gig opportunities for me (Interview 2012).

This is also an example of the importance and prevalence of interdependence within small communities – relationships of reciprocity between musicians, music students and music shop owners, without which the community music network would collapse.

Another local musician and choir director, Gabrielle, told of her introduction to teaching at Magpie:

I said to my friend ‘I’m going to leave the Valley now, I can’t support myself here’ [financially]. I’m going to have to take my business somewhere else. And she said, ‘you know, why don’t you ask my bosses if you could teach [at Magpie]’ – this was 15 years ago (Interview 2012).

Gabrielle still teaches at Magpie. When describing her continued enjoyment and support from her fellow teachers and the school, she said:

There’s 25 [teachers]… there has been a lovely feeling for a long time that we’re musicians. I don’t have any hesitation of running into one of the rooms, interrupting one of the lessons [to get help with] just little bits that I don’t know – when they’re not busy. Or I get [a fellow teacher] to play some music and I have a sing. It’s just an honour for me to teach the kids and be able to give them the best (Interview 2012).

Magpie music gave Gabrielle a second chance at living in the Valley; it introduced her to a career in teaching she might not have ever taken up. Musicians in the Valley can earn some
income at Magpie while being surrounded by, and able to learn from, other musicians. Liz also described this:

We also try to provide... a place for the teachers. A lot of them live in isolated areas and if they’re not performing it [helps to] springboard their performing opportunities. We’re seeing more of the locals doing well on the international scene like Kim Churchill, Daniel Champagne, Lucie Thorne, Heath Cullen, to name a few and they’ve all come through the school of music… they’ve been teachers and students. So, that’s really special (Interview 2012).

When asked if there would be any difference in the way the School was run if it had been in a larger, or different city, Liz said that Bega offered “a community feel, and I think being so far away from other things is a disadvantage to a lot of kids, but music can provide them an escape and keep them occupied” (Interview 2012).

Being in a thinly populated rural area gives more visibility and urgency to the services provided by Magpie – for musicians, students and the community. Although the school struggles with finding new students and maintaining existing ones, especially through tough economic times, owners and teachers remain optimistic as to its future. For example, Liz described the shop’s ability to sell CDs:

It’s interesting with CD sales, everyone is having problems selling CDs but we don’t, because people come in, they give you money, and they want something in their hand. They don’t get into the downloading thing. The young ones do, but the older people don’t. And it’s value for money I guess (Interview 2012).
Despite its link to the more commercial side of music production in the Valley, Magpie School of Music also provides support for community music directors, their programs and ultimately supports local music creation.

4.6.2 High schools and primary schools

In rural areas where there are generally fewer opportunities to engage with music, especially for young people whose parents may or may not be fans, primary and high schools become important sites of introduction and exposure to music. Schools in the Valley are key venues for inspiring the musical interest of new generations, and are another place where local musicians, certified to teach, can earn an income and find moral support. Kyle, a local blues musician, described how his own experiences going to school in Bega shaped his musical interest:

> When I was in primary school, the school had a music program where once you reached year 3, you had to learn an instrument (it was compulsory). There was a choice between recorder and guitar, so I decided playing guitar would be the better option. The principle of the school was the teacher of my guitar class and he was very supportive, so he would have to be my biggest inspiration in picking up the guitar and sticking with it (Interview 2012).

Kyle’s positive interaction with music at such a young age paved the way to where he is today, with an album released and a plan to study music education at university.

Music teachers inspire young people to create and enjoy music (Hallum 2010). Suzanne, a local primary music teacher, described her own teaching style and the promotion of music and musical expression in her classes:
I encourage them to make up their own stuff as much as possible – their own songs. And you know that it’s not something that only certain people can do. Actually anyone can write a song as much as you can write a poem. You know, it might not be a commercial thing, but that’s not the point, so... it’s great. One of the kindies last year... wrote this really simple song. And I’m still playing it! (Interview 2012).

As in Finnegan’s (1989) work in Milton Keynes, schools in the Valley are centres for musical practice in their own right, developing new skills in aspiring musicians.

Schools also offer a place for incoming musicians, who take up teaching positions, to meet new people and make musical connections. Nick described his own experiences upon moving to the region:

It’s not easy from an outsiders perspective [to start programs]. I worked for maybe 4 years at the… school as a music teacher before I even began doing other community work… The school has been a big thing for me… I established that music program… so in a way it’s like, they’re my clients… that community that is generated by the school. You know, they work well and there’s a sense of goodwill and trust there already… If I posted something in the [school newsletter] that I was going to run a course in music appreciation… I know that I would get more than I could take just out of the parents from that school because they would all go ‘oh, that would be good!’ Because I have worked with them in some capacity or another. So the connections are already made (Interview 2012).

As a teacher, Nick was able to make connections with parents and build up trust and accountability through his work with the school’s music program. He then was able to create community programs that were well attended and supported. This was alluded to earlier when Nick spoke of the differences in working in rural Australia, where people care more about
what type of person you are rather than who you have worked with previously. Schools were important institutions for community members to build trust.

Parents are also able to make connections through the schools. Doug, a new resident to the Valley, described how the school his children attended allowed him to connect with parents of similar musical interests: “I’ve met many people through the… school. Between there and posters I’ve found a group of people to play [music] with” (Interview 2012).

Despite their importance in introducing music to young people, public schools in the Valley – like in many regions (rural and otherwise) – often lack funding for arts programs. Jessica, a volunteer music teacher and musician, described the situation:

I have worked in the local schools, because we don’t [have] the ability to [get] professional music teachers, particularly in primary education, because generally schools are smaller, they only have class teachers. And so if they want to do music in a classroom situation they either do it to the capability of their staff or they ask volunteers to come in, because generally there isn’t enough money to pay professionals… especially just for weekly music lessons. I have seen very little change in how our local schools actually try and teach music. That’s where I think a lot of my frustration is… there’s not a very good curriculum, or if there is it’s not actually pushed through, particularly in the primary schools (Interview 2012).

What Jessica described is a growing trend for all schools, as arts programs get pushed aside. Nevertheless, for each teacher or parent that described the lack of funding available for public school music programs, there were volunteers or local musicians helping to teach music whenever possible. There were also expressions of pride and excitement when it came to the
August Bega Valley Schools Music Festival, where primary and high schools from across the Shire gather for three nights of performing and entertainment.

4.7 Festivals and Music Participation in the Bega Valley

Another means for communities to access music beyond the commercial live music scene is the circuit of festivals in the region. The Bega Valley hosts music festivals showcasing folk, jazz, classical, rock and world music. Over the last decade they have grown into national and international events. Among the most popular festivals are the Cobargo Folk Festival, the Tathra Summer Music Festival, the Candelo festival and the Four Winds Festival. Each has its own fans, but music lovers of the valley tend to cite them all as important venues for performing, meeting other musicians from outside the Valley, and of course as time to listen, and enjoy, national and international music.
4.7.1 Music Festivals of the Valley

Cobargo Folk Festival

![Figure 4.15: Black Jack Morris Dancers performing at the Cobargo Folk Festival 2011, photo courtesy of Prem Samira and Cobargo Folk Festival.](image)

Cobargo Folk Festival has been running for 17 years. Originally a small celebration within the town of Cobargo, the festival has grown to a much larger event. A project of the Yuin Folk Club, it provides a space for local musicians to play and brings in national and international artists. It runs for three days over the last weekend of February at the Cobargo showgrounds and hosts music, drama, arts, poetry, storytelling as well as modern and traditional dance (see Figure 4.15). The festival is family oriented and encourages attendees to bring their instruments and join workshops with the artists.
The Tathra Summer Music Festival was held for the first time in 2012 during the first week of January at the Tathra Hotel (after the desired venue of the Tathra beach front was not approved by council). Three full days of blues, folk, country and rock, from local to international talent, was displayed for tourists and locals. Celebrated local artists such as Heath Cullen (folk rock) (see Figure 4.16), Daniel Champagne (folk/ blues), Lucie Thorn (blues/rock) all performed, in addition to national stars Jeff Lang (blues) and the Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band (swing, jazz, cabaret to blues, with vaudeville routines).

Figure 4.16: Jeff Lang and Heath Cullen perform at Tathra Summer Music Festival 2012, Tathra NSW, Australia.
Candelo Village Festival

The Candelo Village Festival has been held every second year since 2007, by dedicated volunteers from within and outside of the Candelo Arts Society. In contrast to the other longer events, it is held over only one day in the autumn (in March or April) (see Figure 4.17). The Festival is focused on the celebration of local art, and music. Musical genres range from gospel, blues rock, folk and country.

Figure 4.17: Candelo Summer Music Festival 2011 poster. Courtesy of Festival committee and artist, Heath Cullen.
A Candelo Arts Society member described the community involvement leading up to the Festival:

The first festival was good but then the next one there was more people involved and it sort of stepped up. Then the last one was better again, even though the weather was against us. And each time everyone’s had a great time and enjoyed it. And you think you’re not going to get the people to help but then they just come out of the woodwork. There’s all these people helping and it’s just great (Interview 2012).

Although all of festivals bring in tourists they require dedicated locals to set up and plan the successful events (see Figure 4.18).

![Setting up the big top tent for the main performance stage of the Candelo Village Festival, 2011. Photo Courtesy of ABC Open South East NSW.](image)

**4.7.2 Four Winds Music Festival**

Along with the Cobargo Folk Festival, Four Winds Music Festival is the largest and most famous festival in the region. This year, 2012, Four Winds celebrated its 21st year. Hosted in a paddock (see Figure 4.19) just outside of Bermagui, it runs for three days over the Easter
long weekend every second year. The Festival was generated by a group of Bermagui residents with a desire for having access to high quality classical music. Four Winds showcases classical and world music from national and international artists. Along with the array of world class musicians, local food and wines are becoming an increasingly important part of the celebration (Gibson and Connell 2012). The organizational committee has outlined four key components that make up the foundation of the Festival: 1. ‘The place’ which demonstrates a commitment to, and inspiration from, the local environment and the people; 2. ‘People and the Community’ meaning the Festival seeks to bring in visitors for the event but they are dedicated to involving the local community and culture; 3. ‘Music and performing arts’ – this encompasses the organisation’s support for creative expression; and 4. ‘Outreach through arts and education’ which is where the ‘Inspiring’ program was born (see section 4.1) (Four Winds Festival 2012; see also Gibson and Connell 2012, Chapter 7). Four Winds festival’s opening event is one of the highlight concerts performed predominantly by local musicians and community members.

Figure 4.19: Image of Four Winds Festival 2012, Bermagui, NSW, Australia. Photo Courtesy of Robert Tacheci and Four Winds Festival.
Festivals are key events for place marketing and economic gain but also a means to engage community members and inspire volunteerism and goodwill (Gibson and Connell 2011, 2012). Four Winds, and other festivals in the Valley, provide an opportunity for musicians and fans to interact with highly acclaimed national and international artists while also offering opportunities for performance. Local musicians and fans spoke of the Four Winds Festival as crucial for inspiring their own work. Nick explained:

I guess the really fun things that have happened in the last 5 or 6 years... have been because Four Winds Music Festival has happened, and for classical music that’s a real injection of energy. I have worked for the past three Four Winds Festivals, with the artistic directors, and involved the choir, both choirs, for the opening ceremony (Interview 2012).

Jessica, another classically-trained local musician, has seen similar benefits from the Four Winds Festival:

We’re lucky to have Four Winds festival which is generally a [performance] opportunity for very high standard musicians. So that helps a lot in terms of injecting a bit of lifeblood for the local musicians to connect with. That’s actually something else I have done, is volunteer with the Four Winds Festival… that’s been fantastic, really fantastic. Without [the Festival] it would be a much poorer place I think, musically (Interview 2012).

Both Nick and Jessica described Four Winds as an inspiration of music into the community for both listeners and musicians.

What cannot be overstated are the opportunities for local amateurs to perform. Nick described the opening concert of Four Winds, which is focused on the inclusion of local performers:
Especially since we devised that whole opening ceremony where it’s all done with local community members... I think it’s really good to the point where now there’s lots of community involvement before the Four Winds through their ‘Inspiring’ program [see section 4.4.2] and then through the actual thing [festival] there is an element of involving whoever wants to be involved. Even if they are a plumber or something [laughs] they will somehow get them involved (Interview 2012).

Nick continued by explaining the interactions that occur at Four Winds between residents, of all musical backgrounds, and the performers and organizers of the festival: “it’s really cool because then you’ve got people who wouldn’t know anything about classical music rubbing shoulders with some of the best [in Australia]”. Nick explained how this level of community involvement combined with the talent of performers at the Four Winds festival has harboured something special that he believes would not be found in a larger city:

It’s great for the children’s choir. They all know Genevieve Lacy personally and I just sort of think that’s really cool and that doesn’t happen in Canberra. I could have a children’s choir there, sure. But getting that level of engagement with really good composers and conductors, is very special (Interview 2012).

The mix of Valley residents and visitors who have been drawn to the Valley create a rich community of supportive musicians.

4.7.3 Accessibility and music festivals in the Bega Valley

Most participants spoke of the region’s festivals in glowing terms. Nevertheless there were also some criticisms. There will inevitably be those who feel they belong, and those who feel excluded (Duffy and Waitt 2011). Both performers and fans spoke of finding the ticket prices high for Four Winds Festival (around $100) and used labels like ‘snobby’ to describe it.
Because Valley music is predominantly community organized, and fashioned in a way to be as accessible as possible (entry is often free, or based on donation), residents are not accustomed to such high prices. Community group performers also spoke of being shipped in from elsewhere in the Valley and told they were to perform and then get back on the bus so as not to have a ‘free day’ at the festival (predictably, many remained on site). Previous work done by Duffy and Waitt (2011) on the Four Winds music festival, and processes of belonging, found similar stories describing emotions of exclusion but also of ambivalence towards the event as a whole (Duffy and Waitt, 2011).

There was also some tension between local Aboriginal people, who perform at the festivals, and festival organizers. These emotions were fuelled by the performers who felt underpaid and unable to perform anything ‘modern’. Discussions surrounding music and perceptions of ‘traditional’ versus ‘modern’ Australian Aboriginal identity have been addressed in previous research (e.g. Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004; Morgan and Warren 2011; Gibson and Connell 2012). It is important to consider sensitivities of how Aboriginal people wish to perform and represent local culture at festivals.

Local musicians compete for performance spots at festivals; some felt the process was unfair. Gabrielle, a Bega musician, described the difficulty in trying to get a performance spot at the Candelo Festival, where she believed local (to Candelo) musicians were favoured:

    Candelo festival isn’t that easy to get into... because it’s only one day… Candelo is such a cliquey insular thing… and although anyone is able to perform I do sometimes feel like it’s not really my scene. They really all know each other and it’s really insular. I wish Bega had something like that (Interview 2012).

Even though Gabrielle is a musician who lives only twenty minutes away she feels as if she does not belong in Candelo. This is an example of the multiplicity of the music networks in...
the Valley. Both Candelo and Bega act as hubs for discrete networks. It also demonstrates Valley musicians’ unequal access to the hubs of these networks.

4.8 Migration, and Living in the Valley as a Music Fan

In a rural region the movement of one or two musicians into the area can have a notable impact on the music community. When combined with schools and local festivals, incoming musicians can re-write a small town’s musical identity quite quickly, and often dictate the availability of certain cultural amenities such as arts programs. The vibrancy of the musical communities within the Valley has, arguably, helped encouraged migration to the area. Lola, a newly arrived resident, and Jessica, who has been in the Valley for ten years, explained:

We moved away from the hustle of a busy town in Melbourne, and we have chosen to live here in Bega for its beautiful surroundings, beautiful people, and great music! (Lola, Interview 2012).

I have certainly seen more professional musicians moving to the area which is fantastic… I think for a lot of people the reason why they want to live somewhere like Candelo is because of the vibrancy of the musical community. We have a ridiculous number of people [laughing] who are musically inclined (Jessica, Interview 2012).

The community is not the only draw for music fans; local musicians find the physical landscape as a means of inspiration:

The relaxed beach culture is often good inspiration for writing lyrics... the landscape is also good inspiration, as it is such a diverse place.... There is a bigger sense of community, and everyone knows each other, so there is a friendly environment (Kyle, Interview 2012).
Heath Cullen said of living in Candelo:

I love it here… I struggle in the city if I’m there for a long period… it’s nice to be able to come back here and just look out the back door. I don’t see many neighbours and I can turn my amp up loud. It’s wonderful. (Quoted in Shedden 2012)

Nick described the Valley in relation to other rural areas:

There’s a sense where a lot of people sort of see us [people in rural areas] as impoverished in a way of arts and culture… and I think that traditionally that’s the case, but certainly Bega is sort of a bubble at the moment of really amazing music and art. There is a cultural sort of hum (Interview 2012).

Rural places in Australia can be filled with rewarding, albeit complex, creative opportunities. Music fans do not need commercially-driven scenes to engage with music. With less economic incentives, and a focus on community produced music, the music created in the Valley is arguably more meaningful:

It might not be working for the Sydney Symphony or another big musical organization but… it’s still at the level… I think that most people fall into the trap that they think they have to actually perform a lot with major touring groups or whatever and they’re always looking for the next step to take them up the ladder. Whereas you know, I am here with my family and just want to stay here and enjoy this really nice life. It’s very much the feeling that I am making this life as good as it can be for me, as much as for the people around me (Nick, Interview 2012).

People can and do find ways to enrich their lives with music, even when commercial means fail and problems of distance and smallness intervene.
4.9 Conclusion

At a time when the ongoing vitality and sustainability of country towns are at the forefront of conversations it is important to appreciate the impact that creative initiatives have on residents (and communities). It is also important to appreciate the significance of smaller community run productions and programs as forms of creative industries. In the Bega Valley, where a commercial music scene cannot be supported, the residents have taken it upon themselves to generate their own programs, groups and festivals (Figure 4.20).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.20:** Neighbours and friends gather for a Monday afternoon rehearsal of the Bega Brass Band in Tathra, NSW. A Tathra resident volunteered her lawn for an outdoor rehearsal which drew in neighbours carrying drinks and snacks 2012.

Both new residents and those who have grown up in the area find the physical landscape and the people in the community inspirational and supportive. Poor mobility, a lack of funding and a small dispersed population limit community music participation in the Valley but they do not define it. Incoming and long term residents push their own creative limits to find ways
of performing, and creating unique and modern shows. They are the bedrock of music-making in the Valley. Festivals engage people through volunteering and providing performance opportunities. Valley residents, like other rural Australians, struggle with isolation and loneliness, floods, droughts and reduced levels of accessibility to needed services. Nevertheless dedicated and generous people continue to organize, and participate in, the region’s array of community groups.

Now that the context is set with respect to music practices in the Valley, Chapter 5 now turns to a ‘case study within a case study’: the variety of choirs in the region and the people who participate in and direct them. As will be seen in the following chapter, choirs in the Valley provide social outlets, creative outlets and places of spiritual and bodily release.
Chapter 5

Choir Singing in the Bega Valley: a ‘Lifeline’

Choir singing is one of the most popular forms of community music in the Valley. This chapter introduces the different types of choirs, their members and directors, and the benefits they have for those involved. Direct benefits include community learning through increasing choristers’ singing skills, via music theory and history knowledge, and by offering a space for socializing for a dispersed and isolated population. Indirect benefits include an increase in confidence, from learning new skills and socializing, and a renewed self-identity and sense of belonging through participating in a creative group practice. Choir singing also helps members negotiate traditional gender roles and enables support systems and spaces for friendship. Finally, this research uncovered choir members’ ability to feel physical, bodily emotions and spiritual connections through singing. This case study of community choirs reveals the depth of meaning community music groups have for their members.

5.1: An Introduction to Some of the Choirs of the Bega Valley

At any one time there are approximately twelve active formal choirs in the Bega Valley. They vary in goals, repertoire, and participants (see Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1). There are men’s choirs, women’s choirs, mixed gender choirs and children’s choirs. I group these into two main types, ‘formal’ and ‘at-home groups’ (see Table 5.1). This division is helpful when analysing the different benefits and uses of choirs, for both participants and directors. Formal choirs are those where people attend rehearsals in rented spaces like churches, halls, legions and school gyms. Such choirs usually perform a few times a year and can be quite large (up for sixty or more people). At-home groups are generally smaller and as the name suggests, rehearse in homes and often are composed, and generated, by neighbours and close friends.
At-home groups do not often perform publically; they are generally formed to build confidence, socialize, to learn how to sing and to sing for the pure joy of it. Both types of choirs have directors and most pay fees to cover costs of a director. In the more formal groups, music performance, sheet music and rehearsal space are also cash costs. Formal groups generally have websites and through these advertise for new members. At-home groups are often known only by word-of-mouth, through close friends and family. Two choirs were most prominent in interviews and discussions: the Mumbulla Dah’s choir and the sacred choral choir, Heartsong.
Figure 5.1: Distribution of active choirs in the Bega Valley, NSW Australia (2012).
**Table 5.1:** Basic information regarding active choirs in the Bega Valley, NSW, Australia as of autumn, 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choir (gender of participants)</th>
<th>Town in which choir is based</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Years in Existence</th>
<th>Rehearsal Frequency</th>
<th>Avg. Age of Members</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Location of Performances</th>
<th>Repertoire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heartsong (both)</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3-4/ year at the Four Winds Music Festival, Candelo Village Festival, community concerts and events</td>
<td>Sacred choral music with original and traditional arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbulla Dah’s (men only)</td>
<td>Bega</td>
<td>14-15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>fortnightly</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>3-4/ year at the Cobargo Folk Festival and other community events</td>
<td>Popular music from the 60s and onwards, eg., the Beatles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomads Choir (both)</td>
<td>Merrimbula</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8+/ year at local halls and churches including holiday concerts</td>
<td>Classical and popular music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Harmony Choir (women only)</td>
<td>Tathra</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>2-3/ year, at community events and fundraisers</td>
<td>Popular music from the 50s and onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden Singers (both)</td>
<td>Eden</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>up to 10/ year at community events and age care facilities</td>
<td>Popular music from the 50s and onwards. Also do some hymns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega Valley children’s choir* (both)</td>
<td>Bega, Candelo, Bermagui</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>3-4/ year at Four Winds Festival and various community concerts and events</td>
<td>Various original pieces as well as popular songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyndham Hymn Singers (both)</td>
<td>Wyndham</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10 or more per year at local churches and age care facilities</td>
<td>Hymns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Bunch of Singers (both)</td>
<td>Bermagui</td>
<td>~50</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2-3 times at local events and fairs and year end concert</td>
<td>World, sacred, African, contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Home Groups* (both)</td>
<td>Cobargo, Merimbula</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>weekly &amp; fortnightly</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Do not usually perform</td>
<td>Varies depending on tastes of the group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Bega Valley Children’s choir is a collaboration of children’s choirs in Bega, Candelo and Bermagui.

** ‘At home groups’ are linked together in this table because they tend to be more or less of the same structure and size.
Since it began fifteen years ago, the Mumbulla Dah’s choir has changed directors and members. In the beginning it was directed by Valley resident, Jim Lay. Since his passing the group has come in and out of existence with fluctuating support and the need for a director. Presently, Dave Crowden, a Bega musician, has taken over the group. He explained that “It grew out of parents, or dads, from the Mumbulla School. It’s not exclusively for fathers from Mumbulla school. It’s just how it started” (Interview 2012). Currently the group has a membership of about 15, all of which are over the age of 40. The group meets once a fortnight for rehearsal in the upstairs of the local music school. The group sings popular songs with a soft spot for the Beatles. The two to three annual performances include one at the Cobargo Folk festival\(^2\) (see Figure 5.2). In addition to singing, social weekends scattered throughout the year offer member’s vocal chords a break and time to relax with one another at the beach or a barbeque.

\(^1\) To hear an example of this choir, see [http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2010/03/05/2837436.htm?site=southeastnsw](http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2010/03/05/2837436.htm?site=southeastnsw) when Mumbulla Dah’s performed a tribute to Jim Lay at the 2010 Cobargo Folk Festival.
During one of the Dah’s breaks, Bega musician, Arati George started the Bega Valley men’s choir which included some of the members of the Mumbulla Dah’s who no longer had a group to sing with. She said that while she was directing “they sang folky type stuff... about 25 people, and they were so respectful” (Interview 2012). This is one of the notable things about Valley choirs. They tend to disband due to a decrease in members’ ability to attend or a director’s ability to lead, and then reform in a slightly alternative shape. For example, the director of the group may change. Another example of this is the all-women choir in Tathra. There has been at least one group always running but who directs, and the members that attend, fluctuate with their time availability. Clifton (2012) found similar adaptations in his study of the football clubs in the Bega Valley.

5.1.2 Heartsong Choir

Heartsong was started 12 years ago in Bega by Geoffrey Badger because of his love for sacred choral music. He said in an interview: “I run the Heartsong choir which is an adult community choir, a sacred music choir, and there are about 50 choristers signed up”
(Interview 2012). When Geoffrey started the choir he had recently moved to the area. Out of a desire to be involved in something related to sacred music he started Heartsong. Even though it is a sacred choral choir, singers of all denominations are encouraged to join. The choir sings pieces such as Stravinsky’s “Ava Maria”\(^3\) and Vivaldi’s “Gloria”. Songs are performed in both traditional and original arrangements (by Geoffrey). The choir rehearses once a week at St. John’s Church in Bega. Performances occur 3-4 times a year and include a holiday concert (see Figure 5.3), a performance at Four Winds Music Festival, as well as unique smaller performances. For example they were invited to sing the ‘Hallelujah Chorus’ with the Canberra Orchestra.

![Figure 5.3: Heartsong Sacred Choral Choir, directed by Geoffrey Badger, December 2009 performing at St. John’s Church in Bega. Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Badger.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUvZWnlZHK8)
5.1.3 Bega Valley choristers: age, sex and membership

Within a rural setting critical mass can dictate the existence of a choir, as members join and others leave the groups. The choirs with the largest membership are formal ones welcoming both men and women (see Table 5.1). This can be attributed to the fact that they are open to the entire population. The Children’s Choir is also larger, likely because it has best adapted to the distance between towns and the lack of regular public transportation. It has overcome these limitations by being comprised of three smaller groups which rehearse separately, with different directors, in the towns of Candelo, Bega and Bermagui. The three groups combine for performances three-to-four times annually. Single gender choirs and at-home groups tend to be smaller in size, averaging 6-15 members. This is likely because they are composed of groups of neighbours and friends.

Choristers vary in age from group to group but overall most members are over the age of 40 (see Table 5.1). Although a formal survey of the number of men versus women was not feasible it was apparent through observation that groups tended to have more female members then male (other than the obvious – men’s only choirs). In their work, Clift and Hancox (2010), surveyed the gender distribution of choirs in England, Germany and Australia and also found that there were more women than men who participated in choir singing.

Only the Children’s choir requires a short audition to ensure that potential participants have some singing experience. Geoffrey explained: “Last year was the only year I have ever auditioned, and that was for the children’s choir, and that was because we were singing with Sydney’s children’s choir and I just wanted it to be... Some of the pieces are quite difficult and I didn’t want it to be, you know, traumatic for kids” (Interview 2012). Directors ensure
auditions are done with the children’s wellbeing in mind. All other choirs welcome singers from any and all levels of experience, with no auditions necessary.

5.1.4 Directors and the beginning of choirs in the Valley

All of the choral groups included in this study have started in the last 25 years with most having begun in the last 15. Mary, a Bermagui resident, stated “30 years ago there was nothing, few choirs and no festivals” (Interview 2012). Growth was attributed to the in-migration of young families, retirees, and as a result, musicians, from the larger cities. Gerry, a Cobargo resident and choir member, described:

We sort of met a critical mass where – well probably even 20 years ago there were small bands happening in their own jamming groups but – it wasn’t until someone like Geoffrey came to town that we got our show going of Heartsong (and of course, his orchestra and junior choirs). Which has had a big influence on the quality... of music and the concerts we get (Interview 2012).

The movement of passionate musicians to the area increased the availability of activities and their potential capabilities. Most choirs have been created out of a desire for a type of singing to exist by a local musician. Alternatively, as Arati explained; “I get asked to do things. The women’s housing place has asked me to run a choir for them for two weeks” (Interview 2012). Directors and musicians in the Valley may be approached by other professionals to take over or start choirs they can no longer run or they wish to exist.

5.1.5 Repertoire

Repertoires vary greatly within groups. With the exception of Heartsong, the Wyndham Hymn singers and That Bunch of Singers, groups sing popular music from the 1950s
onwards. Some incorporate hymns, original pieces, and arrangements by directors and local musicians. Depending on the occasion, choirs will also sing specific holiday pieces.

The majority of choirs aim to select songs in a democratic way by ensuring that all members are comfortable singing what has been chosen. Arati explained how songs were chosen for her choirs. The first was a Koori women’s choir, with whom she initially struggled to find suitable song preferences:

> The Koori women’s choir sang songs that they loved… songs like ones they would sing at funerals: ‘Amazing Grace’... all the old country songs. You know, Australian country songs. And lots of Jesus songs like ‘take a walk with me...’ really slow and it was what they liked and what they wanted to sing. And you know, I came with all these modern National Koori pride songs that I had collected because I was really interested in Koori music. And I guess, maybe because they were older, they weren’t the slightest bit interested (Interview 2012).

In their work, Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004) found that gospel and religious music was popular among an older Aboriginal generation who learnt such songs on mission settlements and in orphanages and boarding homes; meanwhile country music was very popular amongst Australian Aboriginals for a variety of reasons including their ability to relate to the land-based lifestyle of American Cowboys. Such observations were mirrored here in the preferences of the Koori Choir singers. Later Arati explained some of the difficulties that came with directing a choir at a women’s shelter that had members of very different ages:

> [The young people] wanna do all the pop songs like ‘Jar of Hearts’ by Christina Perry, everything like that. So I am doing all of those, plus catering to some of the older people in the group like ‘You are My Sunshine...’ and ‘Country Road’. I am hoping to
find a medium... It would be really good if I could find a song that’s old that’s been
redone (Interview 2012).

Arati’s personal song preferences sometimes conflicted with those of the choir members:

One of my choirs did stuff like ‘When you’re down and out’… stuff from the 1970s
and 1980s that was, and still is, over-played. But I like more interesting music than
that. Really interesting arrangements that are unusual times, and with more meaning
to them. I mean those people might feel like those songs have meaning too… I’m
really interested in spiritual stuff like, Sweet Honey in the Rock, is a vocal group, that
I just admire so much (Interview 2012).

Through such conversations it became apparent that a large part of being in a choir and
directing a choir is managing group dynamics with a goal of engaging as many people as
possible.

5.1.6 Rehearsal and performance frequency, and location

The majority of choirs in the Valley are heavily focused on developing singing skills and
because of this rehearsals are generally weekly, with the exception of the Mumbulla Dah’s
and some of the at-home groups. Frequency does vary through the year, lessening around
school and summer holidays to allow for members who leave on vacation. There were no
signs that choirs increased in rehearsal frequency leading up to performances, however this
likely varies between groups and circumstance. Rehearsal locations are diverse, depending on
the funding available to rent space, and the size of the group. They are conducted in Masonic
lodges (Nomads choir), music school common rooms (Men’s Choir), elementary schools
(Valley Harmony choir), and any other space that can support a singing group including
churches and living rooms.
Each choir has different goals with respect to performing. The Dah’s, the Children’s Choir and Heartsong all perform at local festivals, including Four Winds, Cobargo Folk Festival and the Candelo Village Festival (see Table 5.1). All of the formal groups perform for benefit concerts, community events, aged care facilities, and normally one or more holiday events. Heartsong, and the Children’s Choir, which are perhaps the most organized and formal choirs in the area, have also done shows with other community music organizations such as the Bega Chamber Orchestra and the Sydney Children’s Choir.

Another limitation on choir performances in the Valley is lack of funding. For example Geoffrey described negotiating the cost of sheet music:

Music’s expensive and if we want to perform anything in the last hundred years then we’re looking at much more money than we can generate with the socio-economic pool that we’re in… I find myself ringing contemporary Australian composers anyways and just saying: ‘Geoffrey Badger from Bega, and we’d like to do your [work]’ and they say, ‘yeah sure, no worries, feel free!’ There’s a lot of goodwill amongst the Australian music community (Interview 2012).

The Valley is a region where funding and fundraising for choirs is very limited, yet Geoffrey and others have persevered and found ways to generate the type of performances and modern music productions they desire.

5.2 Learning and Socializing: Choirs in the Bega Valley

Choirs influence participants’ confidence, sense of identity, ability to negotiate gender roles and connections to their body and spirit. First let us look at choirs and the community learning and socializing that these groups enable.
5.2.1 Singing skills and audience education

When asked what was their favourite part about being in a choir, the majority of choristers said the time to sing, and learn to sing; they then cited positive social aspects (cf. Durrant and Himonides 1998; Louhivuori and Salminen 2005; Clift and Hancox 2007). One director, Gabrielle, of Bega, explained: “they don’t want [the social aspects] to cut into the lesson time; they are there to sing, they love singing” (Interview 2012). Cathy, a member of two choirs said: “I like singing. And learning about singing and just doing it” (Interview 2012). Types of learning varied from physical singing skills to reading music and helping increase singers’ confidence. Tim cited learning to sing by ear as one of his accomplishments:

I have been singing now for 11 years. I don’t read music. I have no idea what the dots on the page mean but I find that we [the choir] can pick up pieces quicker now than we did [before]. And I think that’s just a matter of practice. You [can] train your ear to hear (Interview 2012).

Tim has been part of the Heartsong choir for a number of years and although he lacks any formal training outside of choir he has adapted in order to learn his parts by ear.

Directors of the different choirs have varying strategies in teaching choristers, and achieving their own goals. At-home choirs tend to be slightly more relaxed, focusing on confidence and vocal skills. Formal groups are focused on individual and group singing skills. Suzanne, a director and educator, described her at-home choir and her approach to teaching during its rehearsals:

Mainly as just a vehicle for teaching people how to sing and how to hold a harmony. You know that’s my aim, that people enjoy the actual singing process and if they can learn to sing harmony along the way that’s great, great for the choir. It’s very much a learning choir... I make the suggestion about how it is best to breathe and how it is best to stand...
I don’t run around correcting, but in the next two weeks I’ll just say ‘okay, we’ll start some exercises, don’t forget about your feet’ (Interview 2012).

Suzanne’s description illustrates the relaxed nature of the at-home group and the need for members to take on their own initiatives in learning more skills. This is conducive to members having diverse goals. Those who wish to learn more can ask Suzanne, while others who are there for social reasons will not feel they are being pushed too far. Suzanne explained this:

There are probably times people wish others didn’t talk so much and sing more. And there are probably some people who wish it was a bit more casual… I don’t know, you just find your way [with a teaching balance]. I mean if people keep coming back it’s a reasonable thing to think [laughing] (Interview 2012).

Formal groups tended to have a more systematic approach to teaching new singing skills. Gabrielle, a director of one formal group, described focusing initially on individual voice quality, followed by skills needed to sing as a group:

The first thing I do is work on their voices so they are really able to control their voice… [Then] they’re actually seeing this development in their own voice and that’s exciting to them, because they’re actually becoming better singers and that’s what they want. They just want to be able to sing well. The other thing that happens is that they learn how to sing better with each other, to learn parts really quickly. That develops… [and] to be able to hold the note better, together [in their section], even while there are other parts going (Interview 2012).

In addition, an emerging theme from interviews, and observations, was that choirs taught choristers about the context of songs – their histories and origins. When new songs were
introduced at Heartsong’s rehearsals, members and the director would often tell stories they knew about the song’s history or personal experiences performing it previously. When they began to sing Handel’s ‘Hallelujah Chorus’, from Messiah, there was a discussion surrounding the role King George II played in the tradition of standing during its performance. This same discussion sparked a debate between choristers about when King George II was in power.

Learning did not stop with the directors and choristers. Geoffrey Badger described how, upon starting Heartsong, there was a process of educating the community about the music before the choir performances were well attended:

You have to educate audiences and so it’s taken me, like the choir… has been going on, this is its 11th year, well it’s going into its 12th year now, which is long for any community music group. I think for the first couple of years we’d have like a dozen or so people coming to a concert and they’d be absolutely blown away… Then each concert we had more and more people come… (Interview 2012).

As the group grew in popularity more members joined and more audience members attended the performances.

As will be seen in section 5.3.1, learning new singing skills gave choir members confidence to sing aloud (when they had previously been told not to) and to join other more technical singing groups. Education was frequently the first reason for being choir member. The second was socializing.

5.2.2 Choir Singing as a means for socializing

Choirs in the Bega Valley are important social outlets in the lives of their participants. They provide a space for socialization in alternative environments to the traditional community
sports teams, or churches. In an area with a small population such groups often enable the mixing of people who might not have otherwise met (Bourke 2001; Langston and Barrett 2008; Bourke 2001). Sharon, a Cobargo resident explained that she “really like[s] the social aspects of it – you know meeting people” (Interview 2012). Valley choirs pushed people to join groups towards which they were apprehensive, and tight bonds ensured rehearsals, and performances, remained light hearted and enjoyable.

One participant, Gerry, a Cobargo resident and choir enthusiast, described his shock at his own involvement, as a man of no denomination, in Heartsong, a sacred music choir, and his appreciation of the people he has met through this, and his other choirs:

One of the fantastic things about it is the sociability of it [being in a choir]… I would never expect to gather together with devout Christians [laughs] and be as one. Or to enter a church singing the sacred music that has been written to be sounded within a church, within this sort of an echoing environment. And I found that very enlightening... so that’s really good. The men’s group, and all the choirs that I am with, they are different sociological groups and different levels within society of intellectualism and what have you. But when you come together with singing you become as one, and there’s people that I wouldn’t otherwise meet. I wouldn’t be here! I certainly wouldn’t be here – well I wouldn’t be in town on a Monday night... I wouldn’t be sitting here in this church all just having had a meal and chatted with some people [about] their social [life], their problems, and then later move on to singing (Interview 2012).

Heartsong opened up sacred choral music to members of all faiths who were interested in singing songs. In so doing the choir introduced people with different beliefs in the Valley, by capitalising on their common love of sacred music. Gerry also pointed out how each choir he
belonged to was a slightly different social group. Because of the timing of the rehearsals
Gerry, and many other choir members, often eat dinner at a community centre beside the
church before singing. This practice engaged people across the Bega community that would
not have otherwise met.

The trepidation of joining a sacred music choir was also felt by Jesse, another Cobargo
resident:

Yeah, the choir I was in before was much different. I knew that the choir made
beautiful music, but I was a bit shy about the churchiness of it. I just thought, I gotta.
It’s not too bible thumping. It can be cross denominational I think (Interview 2012).

Jesse and Gerry were both welcomed into a group that exposed them to religion in a way that
they might not have otherwise experienced. They were able to sing sacred choral music
without affiliation to any particular faith. They both overcame their anxiety about singing in
the choir and embraced their fellow choir members.

Gerry and Jesse were passionate about how sacred music brought different people together.
Gerry felt connected while singing, despite differences. In a larger city Gerry and Jesse may
have decided against joining such a choir and instead may have joined a more secular group
and never would have experienced the joy of singing in a sacred music choir.

Among reasons for members enjoying Heartsong were, as Jesse commented, the relaxed
relationship between the director and the choristers. The balance allowed everyone to enjoy
themselves while attaining a high standard of artistry:

The music is taken seriously and I think we’re sort of taught and mentored by [the
director] but at the same time I think there’s some humour there. There’s a nice
balance between seriousness, taking the beauty of the music seriously, but also having fun. So that’s why I like it – and there are really, really nice people to sing with (Interview 2012).

Jesse felt that there was a need for a balance within the choir between socializing/humour and skill development. Tim, a Bega resident, explained a similar comfort in the way the group was run, and commented on the camaraderie between the members of his own section in the choir:

It’s a good choir because we don’t get too serious and I think that’s a major problem when a choir gets serious or the directors get serious – it loses its way. And we enjoy ourselves – we take the mickey out of each other. I am a bass, so we’re the oil slick at the back of the choir (Interview 2012).

Tim and Jesse both commented on the need for choirs to stay fun, and not get too serious, in order that everyone enjoyed themselves. I observed this frequently – a member of the basses poking fun at the director, or other choir members. Tim’s reference to his own section, the all-male basses, highlights a theme that will be touched on later, about the bonding that occurs in choirs, especially in single-sex choirs.

Although important themselves, in the next section it becomes clear that the social networks that choirs form and the skills that they instil, are equally important for members’ increased sense of confidence and wellbeing.

5.3 Confidence and Self-Identity: Choirs in the Bega Valley

The social aspects and education that choirs offer can increase an individual’s confidence and self-identity. Gaining confidence increases members physical and mental wellbeing. When combined with
a more solid sense of self, confidence from social interactions enable choir members to have stronger
feelings of belonging within the community.

5.3.1 Confidence and wellbeing: finding the freedom to sing

There is something about a voice that’s personal, not unlike the particular odour or
shape of a given human body. Summoned through belly, hammered into form by the
throat, given propulsion by bellows of lungs, teased into final form by tongue and
lips, a vocal is a kind of audible kiss, a blurted confession, a soul-burp you really
can’t keep from issuing” (Lethem 2008).

The above quote by Johnathan Lethem is an appropriate prelude to the following
collection of conversations about the personal battles some individuals have overcome in order to sing in
public. Singing is a personal expression because it is literally, as Lethem points out, shaped
by our physical selves. It is also deemed personal because of the attachment of a person’s
singing voice to their ‘soul’ (Bloomfield 1993). When something so personal is criticized, the
embarrassment and shame felt often stops a person from singing publicly again.

Choir singing comes from a history of being performed by very specific voices in very formal
ways (Richards and Durrant, 2003; Rickwood, 2010). Such traditions have bred a culture of
narrow ideas about ‘good voices’ and ways of singing. As will be seen, a director’s
preconceptions about acceptable voices can end in the devastation of a young person’s self-
esteeem. Singing in a group can be intimidating to many people, especially those who have
had negative experiences previously when they sang. Whether it was teachers, parents or
other authority figures that told them they were ‘awful’ or ‘terrible’, or even hit them for
missing notes, it embarrasses individuals and inhibits their desire to sing. Louis, a Bega
resident, said of his experience singing in a Catholic choir in Holland: “if you sung the
wrong note you were belted! [laughing]… Yeah it was! [harsh] But still it didn’t seem to
discourage us from doing it. It was a beautiful choir, with an Iron Hand!” (Interview 2012). The ‘iron hand’ that Louis refers to came from the popular use of physical discipline in Catholic Schools of the time (O’Donoghue 2007). Despite the discipline, Louis and his fellow choir members continued to sing in the group and still today Louis maintains that it was a beautiful choir.

Physical reprimands were only mentioned the once but past verbal abuse from others was described by a few participants. Gabrielle, a director, described the impact that negative comments have had on a number of her adult choristers:

It’s such a common thing – the amount of people that come in and the first thing they do is… they begin to tell you and then they start to cry... and you just have to be there for them and that’s just part of it…They cry and then the next thing is the story of what someone said to them. I don’t know why people did that [teachers/directors telling choristers with ‘poor voices’ to leave the room]… but if you sing out of key you can get your voice to be in key. You can, maybe only for one song, but it’s about listening and learning (Interview 2012).

As a director, Gabrielle deals with choristers that battle with self-esteem and confidence, in the beginning, at every rehearsal, in order to participate in a choir (cf. Turton and Durrant, 2002; Harrison 2009). Jean, a Bermagui resident, faced ridicule and harsh judgement throughout much of her childhood and into her adult life which stopped her from singing:

As a child I had a very negative experience singing at school. They would put tuning forks to our voices and then just yell: ‘out!’… I was very embarrassed… My ex-husband would make negative comments when I sang and so I would mime instead of sing (Interview 2012).
A lack of support from a partner and school teacher kept Jean from singing in public until her 40s. What changed in her life was: “I had been recently separated and was looking for some new meaning in my life” (Interview 2012). She described how joining an at-home choir had:

Giv[en] me confidence to actually sing in a group of people... I have a granddaughter now and I like to sing to her. And even my daughter, I [sang] in the car [and she] said ‘mom you’re singing so much better’. It’s just been freeing (Interview 2012).

Jean described her ability to now sing in a group and feel good about her voice. It has been freeing to sing again, as if before she had been unable to express herself. Jean continued by describing the atmosphere of her choir, which allowed her to feel comfortable enough to sing: “It’s not very technical… I know the people… we’re comfortable with each other and there are others who haven’t sung very much… [the choir director] is very supportive and positive” (Interview 2012). Jean was comfortable with the others. Their support and similar singing experience helped her to overcome her fears. She also said that being part of the choir has become “very much for the love of singing... then it’s the social connections” (Interview 2012). An increase in her singing skills, and confidence, enabled Jean to reconnect with her love of singing.

For Valley residents who lack the confidence to join formal choirs, at-home groups were convenient alternatives because they increased confidence levels and skills in a supportive environment. Suzanne, a local director of an at-home group, described her choir:

It’s not a huge choir. It’s probably 10 people but on any fortnight I would probably get 7 or 8 come… And it’s just sort of turned out that it’s more a choir for people who maybe haven’t had a chance before… With one or two exceptions they’ve never done
anything like that before. For them it’s a really nice experience just to have a go (Interview 2012).

Such choirs are generally very relaxed and the goal for most members is to learn new skills and enjoy a night out. In conversation Gerry described the benefits of an at-home choir, held in his own house, for some of his neighbours:

**Gerry:** now that it’s moved to my street [choir rehearsal] there are a couple of single women who were told they couldn’t sing at school and have never sung since and have now joined in the choir and are discovering that it is not true that they can’t sing – as in they are incapable of singing – they simply haven’t learned to sing. It takes a long time… to develop a singing voice.

**Interviewer:** And so they feel comfortable enough to participate in an informal choir but not something more structured?

**Gerry:** yeah, that’s right we’re such a downbeat little group that they could join in... They wouldn’t dare to try and join something like Heartsong because it is so structured... but we just have a fun gathering and once again there are a few people in that group, although I have known them as near neighbours for quite some years, I have never known them as friends, and now they are (Interview 2012).

Choirs were social outlets and spaces for less confident singers to try group singing and get some direction in a less intimidating space. Choirs have redefined relationships with acquaintances and friends.

Another chorister, Cathy, a Cobargo resident, described how she benefited from the different roles that the at-home choir and the more formal choir played in her own singing:
I learn a lot of stuff here [at formal choir] and then I take that back to the other choir [at-home group]. And at the other choir I am kind of more advanced I suppose… one of the things was because I was singing in the other choir [at-home] I actually realized I could sing higher. Which I didn’t have the confidence to do here [at the formal choir] (Interview 2012).

She continued: “Heartsong has given me experience, practice and confidence and then I take that to the other group and the other group [at-home choir] gives you space to play around with things” (Interview 2012). Cathy capitalised on the different spaces that each choir offered for her own learning and confidence building. For Cathy, the at-home choir, which was once the only choir she attended, became a place where she could try new things and continue to practice what she learned in her more formal group.

Gerry also described his wife’s hesitation at joining a formal choir:

[the formal choir] has being going on, I think, eleven years… I sang with the group for 5, 6 years maybe, before [his wife] even thought that she could join in. I don’t know why, [maybe] because she didn’t think she could sing well enough... She certainly is not the worst singer by a long shake in the group [laughing]. She didn’t have the confidence. And so, all of these groups [choirs] are giving people confidence in their singing (Interview 2012).

The choirs of the Valley, both informal and formal, have given people a second chance at singing, through offering supportive environments, and a focus on learning new skills.
5.3.2 Memories and self-identity

Choir members in the Bega Valley vary in ages, cultural backgrounds and duration of time spent in the Valley. Choir singing offers one way in which members can perpetuate and create their self-identity (Frith 1996; Grape and Sandgren 2003; DeNora 2006). Singing can play a part in self-identity through inciting memories of good experiences and reaffirming the role that singing, and music, play in defining an individual’s identity (Firth 1996; DeNora 2004). When asked why they joined a choir, all of the male choristers interviewed made reference to positive childhood or early adulthood experiences with singing and choir singing.

Louis, a 75 year old Bega resident said:

I was brought up Catholic, and went to Catholic school with my brothers. We did sing a lot of sacred music… although not all of the choirs I have been with have been sacred music. They have been all – well they have all been classical music. But this choir again, is sacred music which I really enjoy. I think it was part of sort of bringing your childhood back you know, memories (Interview 2012).

Singing was a way in which Louis could relive, but also reinforce, his identity as a singer, and particularly as he described further, a sacred music singer. After having moved to Australia Louis used choirs as a way to retain and perpetuate his self-identity:

And as soon as I heard that they were starting a choir I was into it. I have been in choirs all over Australia – in Sydney, in Wollongong, in Perth, in Melbourne. And when I was young, in Holland (Interview 2012).
Choirs in Australia were a way for him to reconnect with his roots and childhood in Holland and as a way for him to continue to perform his own identity.

Gerry, another choir member, described a relationship with singing rather than choirs specifically:

As a kid I was a Scout so we had campfires and singing – you know ‘Kumbaya’ – and then I took off hitchhiking around the world. I carried on singing ‘Kumbaya’ and then I learned a few Arabic songs when I was travelling through North Africa and a Japanese song from a Japanese person. Scouting took me to the Azores where I learned a Portuguese song. That’s fifty something years ago, and I can still, because I do occasionally sing them in the shower, remember them! (Interview 2012).

For Gerry singing was a way to interact and connect with a local culture that was new to him. Singing was a way for him to bond with others, like his Scouts group. By singing songs he learned fifty years ago, Gerry was able to relive moments and once again travel vicariously to these places (cf. Connell and Gibson 2004). Being part of a choir in the Bega Valley for Gerry seemed to continue his pattern of meeting new people, and expressing himself, through music.

Tim, a 60 year old Bega resident, explained how his passions for singing were rooted in his Naval career:

I like singing in Heartsong because it sings the kind of music I like to sing. I have sung in choirs before. I sang in the HMS choir, an all-male voice choir when I was in the navy and we sang nautical songs. Good nautical songs, not sort of bad ones you know that you would sing when you were drinking. Yeah, I like this kind of music (Interview 2012).
Like Louis and Gerry, Tim relived (and recreated) memories from past singing experiences in his Naval choir, therefore reinforcing his self-identity. Like Louis, Tim also emphasized the importance of the sacred choral genre of music in his ability to relive his past. The music that Louis and Tim identified with helped shape who they were as singers, music fans, and individuals.

Curiously, it was only the male choristers who cited specific memories as reasons for being part of a choir. This confers with findings of Clift and Hancox (2010), who showed that women choir members were instead more likely than men to use choir singing as a way to increase their wellbeing. Clift and Hancox (2010) estimated that men may be more inclined to join choir for social reasons and because of an attachment to the actual music being sung. The connection that Tim and Louis had to the sacred music aligns with this hypothesis.

5.4. Bega Valley Choirs and Rural Australian Men and Women

In the conduct of this research, gender emerged as an important variable: men and women seem to perceive benefits from choir singing differently (Clift and Hancox 2010). Being aware of this can help understand the way in which choir members in the Valley can have different relationships within their respective groups. The following sections outline ways in which the all-male choirs and all-women choirs were perceived to create special bonds and loyalties, distinct from those in larger mixed gender groups.

5.4.1 Bega Valley choirs and Australian masculinity

For men, all-male choirs offered ways to socialize outside of the traditional scenes of a pub, or a sports field. This provided an opportunity for men of different backgrounds, ages and physical abilities to bond over a common interest: singing. Although the mixed gendered
choirs were larger (see Table 5.1) single gendered choirs offered different levels of support and social connection.

The loyalty of men to an all-male choir based out of Bega was described by Gabrielle, a local director, as being dependent on its male-only membership:

Dave Crowden’s choir, the men’s choir, that he runs they are also just really loyal to it – and they get so much out of it. The one gender thing I think is really a big factor as well: I don’t know why but the way they are devoted to their choir. It might not always be but it does seem that the one gender choirs really stick (Interview 2012).

Choir members may feel a larger sense of loyalty to this all male group because it can perpetuate their self-identity while offering them a unique opportunity to also belong to a collective identity. In a rural area it can be difficult for non-sports playing men to find a social group. The choir enabled a sense of belonging in a group of men who otherwise might not have had one. Another reason for the increased sense of loyalty to the group was because of the social aspects described by Gerry:

It’s interesting getting together as a group of men and having a men’s group… we have one day each holiday break at somebody’s for a barbeque and if it’s down the coast it will be for a swim or this or that, and that’s sort of good bonding happening outside of the actual singing. It probably makes you sing better together (Interview 2012).

Such male-only social opportunities were provided by the choir, to share stress or problems in their life, or to just relax with friends. Group bonding also reinforced ideas of mateship in Australian male culture, which Harrison (2009) stipulates involves activities absent of women.
Gabrielle described how the men also bonded and socialized during break at rehearsals:

In the break the men would just be talking to each other, like chattin’ and talkin’… about stuff they gotta do in their lives. Like work out how the pump works and stuff like that – like ‘do you know where you get that part’ and this kind of thing (Interview 2012).

As mentioned in Little’s work (2002) on gender roles in rural areas, traditional gender roles tend to discourage men from asking for help because they feel like they will be judged or seem incompetent. A men’s choir then may offer a rare place in which rural men can feel comfortable asking for advice from one another.

Another way in which choir singing connects with ideas of Australian male identity is through the opportunity for performing, as a ‘team’, in competitions (Faulkner and Davidson 2006; Harrison and 2009). Like a sports team the choirs rehearse, bond and are oriented towards a goal of winning, or performing well (Rickwood 2005; Faulkner and Davidson 2006). Although the all-male choir in the Valley did not compete, they did perform publically and these performances were mentioned as if to give authenticity or validity to the choir’s artistic ability. Gerry spoke of a yearly performance at a festival as a goal giving their singing purpose:

But the men’s choir that I am with, we have a goal, currently we do, of singing at a festival – a folk festival which gives us a purpose, whereas if you just turn up each day it’s like going to school because you have to [laughing]. Rather than choosing music as an elective – it’s a very different level of interest and involvement (Interview 2012).
Despite the ability of men to connect in a number of ways with the traditional Australian male identity, there were still some members not completely comfortable with their fellow choristers; homophobia was a perceived problem. Gerry explained:

"Most males or, a lot of males, are quite homophobic and won’t stand shoulder to shoulder [laughing]... particularly the older ones. There’s a gentlemen present in the room that we’ve tried a few times and can’t get him to stand within a metre of somebody else. Which is quite funny, really” (Interview 2012).

Choir singing can reinforce traditional Australian male traits, by offering a group in which to bond or feel mateship with others, a group with and with which to engage in a goal oriented activity that can be competitive. However, to some choir members, all-male choir singing still challenges their own perceptions of what represents Australian heterosexual masculinity (Longhurst 2000; Jarvie 2006; Harrison 2009; Rickwood 2010). Despite mixed emotions, the men continued to attend the group; albeit with their own boundaries.

Choirs in the Bega Valley can been seen as a paradoxical space where they can reframe Australian masculinity within the activity of singing yet still be dominated by aspects of traditional ‘mateship’ including heterosexuality. Choirs challenge some men to accept new spaces for male camaraderie and reshape their own gender identities (Faulkner and Davidson 2006; Harrison 2009). In so doing, choirs offer men who cannot, or do not wish to play sports or socialize in a pub another way of attaining a sense of belonging in an isolating environment.

5.4.2 Bega Valley choirs and women

The benefits of an all-women’s choir in a rural area were the support systems, knowledge sharing and a sense of comfort and trust among choristers. In a rural area such relationships
are important to an individual’s sense of belonging and wellbeing (cf. Bourke 2001).

Gabrielle described some of the social support that resonated within the women’s groups:

Someone might come in and they just had some bad news – their mum’s sick or
dying, or their child’s not well... everyone knows and they’re there for them, and they
say: ‘well we’re glad you’re here’. They’re grabbing them and putting their arms
around them. That person just starts crying and everyone holds the person who’s
crying. Or someone’s pregnant and everyone’s laughing and they’re like ‘come on
you!’; or someone’s got a new boyfriend and they’re like ‘Ohh you!!’ and all the sex
jokes come out. It’s just really, because it’s women, the bond… and the power of the
group keeps people coming every week... (Interview 2012).

Choirs in the Bega Valley provide a much needed place for women to tell stories and share
worries. Gabrielle also acknowledged that this bonding and sharing was a powerful reason for
the group getting together every week. Jean, a member of a women’s choir, mentioned that
having had negative childhood experiences with singing, the first choir she sang in was an all
women’s choir (at-home) because it was ‘very supportive, encouraging and enjoyable’
(Interview 2012).

Choirs also offered the women a time for sharing knowledge, skills and asking questions on
topics ranging from child bearing to baking. Gabrielle explained her own feelings towards
this type of companionship:

So you’re having a baby, and you’re at the point where the baby is this age and you
don’t know what to feed it or it’s having a problem and it’s not eating… you go [to
choir] and you’ve got this pool of knowledge. There’s twenty women who’ve brought
up kids… Or if you’ve found out you have cancer or you want to know where you can
get your mother into a home. You’ve got twenty women all different, you know?
One’s run a business… another’s worked in China… and one’s travelled the world…
and another – I dunno, worked in a brothel! Who knows? They just know so much
between them… it mimics that whole thing about the circle of people, and the tight
knit group of a community, like we used to have in the old villages and stuff like that.
I used to feel like they were my elders… All these women gathering together with all
of their knowledge and wisdom (Interview 2012).

Being that rural areas have increasingly fewer government services and limited health
services, choirs are places to ask questions about child rearing or cancer, or travelling. This in
turn was extremely important for the wellbeing of the men and women involved.

The women’s group was described as having a diverse population. This was likely, in part,
dictated by the small dispersed population of the Valley. The various backgrounds and
experiences of the women gave Gabrielle what she called a group of ‘elders’ who she felt
comfortable asking questions to and taking their advice. Gabrielle elaborated on how
important she felt this supportive place was that the choir offered:

I would often think I’m not being paid enough… but whenever I wanted to give up I
would think not just the social fun but… what would I do without those women to
ask, they were like my elders. They were mostly elder then me and I didn’t want to
leave that circle of women. Where else in my life was there something like that? It
was like the old ways, you know, the community (Interview 2012).

As Gabrielle has pointed out, there are few opportunities in rural, and urban, areas for such a
diversity of women to meet together regularly helping each other and offering support.
Social networks are important to all communities, but in rural areas where smaller populations tend to provide fewer possible spaces for social connections of all forms, choirs are extremely important for knowledge sharing, and emotional support (Bourke 2001). Although few women outwardly commented on the support they felt from their fellow choir members, it was visible through the interactions that Gabrielle described and the way that those who fell sick received supportive gifts and visits from other choir members. Gabrielle described the way in which women feared having to leave the group and the role group dynamics could play in this scenario:

Yeah, there’s trusting each other enormously but then there would be issues of someone maybe… say someone says ‘that women was flirting with my husband’ or something happened between some of them that can be a real thing too… you don’t wanna leave the choir, this is your life now. Every Tuesday morning or Tuesday evening that’s your time. A lot of women will say it’s the only time they had out from the kids. The husband minds the kids or something like that, and they make it their one thing for them (Interview 2012).

It is important to note that Gabrielle highlighted the vulnerability of such relationships, especially in a small town, and the importance that choirs had in the lives of the members. For many, it was their only personal time. Sharon, a member of Heartsong, described something similar: “Heartsong is my time – time for me to focus on my own singing” (Interview 2012). For many men and women in the Bega Valley choir singing is essential, it is social and educational but above all it is personal and inspirational.
5.5 The Indescribable: Singing and the Body and Soul

When he sings, he’s not just singing soulfully. He is imparting his soul. You are hearing something deep within the man” - (Billy Joel on Ray Charles, quoted in Lethem 2008)

Singing is personal both because it is emitted from our bodies and because there is a notion that singing, as the above quote illustrates, is some sort of direct channel to a person’s soul and innermost emotions (Bloomfield 1993). Participants often spoke of either a spiritual/soulful connection they shared with music and singing or a physical release they felt from singing. In these moments of physical pleasure and connections music was embodied by the singers. Some choristers were unsure exactly what they felt, or how to describe it, but they understood singing as something that was ‘necessary’ in their lives.

As stated the act of singing is physical and so are the bodily affects that it creates (DeNora 2004). Choristers spoke of physical releases they felt from singing and singing as a group. These moments were described as ‘highs’, and pleasurable, as well as an infusion of energy. Mary says: “I just got such a pleasure and high when it all gelled you know” (Interview 2012). When Mary heard all the sections of the choir singing their pieces properly she had an increased feeling of pleasure.

Another choir member, Jacqueline, spoke of a physical release from singing: “I just think that music is wonderful – that the release, well it’s like sex... there’s such a wonderful pleasure and release” (Interview 2012). Jacqueline’s comparison with sex, and Mary’s use of the word ‘high’, illustrate two bodily affects from singing. As seen in work by Clift and Hancox (2001, 2010) singing (and singing well) was a catalyst for the release of endorphins and other biological reactions that gave the singers bodily pleasure.
The connection between singing and self-expression of soul and spirit could be seen in the relationship choristers had with the repertoire of the choir. Gabrielle described how an amount of personal connection to the pieces was necessary for the choir members to feel comfortable singing them:

They don’t want to sing anything they feel uncomfortable with. It’s not the majority, it’s everybody, so you’ve got to make sure everyone’s comfortable to sing the song... They don’t wanna hear someone being weak – they’ll say ‘I don’t like that song, that women sounds like she’s a wimp, or weak, she let that guy walk all over her’ or ‘we’re not singing that Irish song that talks about being done over by a bloke’… You know what I mean? If one person doesn’t like it we can’t do it usually. Or they have to then go, ‘Oh, alright’, or ‘I’ll just sing over here’ (Interview 2012).

The connection between singing and self-expression moved beyond the lyrics of the repertoire and into the realm of spirituality.

Choir members described their relationship with singing, and the repertoire, as one beyond the body, by relating the connection to soul and spirit. Gabrielle explained:

There is something essential about it [singing]. It’s just such a deeply expressive thing and I have always said that singing for example is like the expression of the soul more than any other – like it just… you can hear the soul through the voice (Interview 2012).

Gerry and Jesse, both members of Heartsong, described similar emotions:

“Singing is great for the soul – whatever that is! [laughs] I mean it really is a wonderful thing to sing. Uplifting” (Gerry Interview 2012).
“I think being in this choir, it’s particularly wonderful because it’s very uplifting music. It’s spiritual. It makes me feel uplifted when I am finished, it’s great!” (Jesse Interview 2012).

Lisbeth, a Bega resident, said: “I need to sing: I have been a part of choirs all of my life and I just love singing” (Interview 2012). Beth, a Bega resident described singing in Heartsong as:

It’s my lifeline. That’s what I like best about it… it’s more than just social, it’s really soul stuff. This choir, well mainly this choir, because I have always belonged to choirs, always loved them, but this choir has really got something special about it. It just uplifts you. It doesn’t matter how tired you are you just go and you don’t know you’re tired. You know what I mean? The singing might not be any good [laughs] but it, it is just great (Interview 2012).

Singing in a choir is a collaborative activity yet it inspires individual bodily and spiritual reactions. Injections of energy, intense feelings of pleasure and joy, combined with a sense of spiritual wellbeing form the layers of meaning that choristers have for choir singing. Beth called Heartsong a ‘lifeline’; the Oxford Dictionary (2012) defines ‘lifeline’ as “a thing on which someone or something depends or which provides a means of escape from a difficult situation”. It is a perfect illustration of the depth of meaning that choir groups have for their members. Beth and others depend on their choirs when they face obstacles in life and they need energy, inspiration or a temporary escape. Choirs may be centred on learning and socializing but ultimately the joy that they bring the members goes far beyond anything a commercial market for music could offer.
5.6 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on choir singing to demonstrate that as a form of community music in the Bega Valley, it engaged a variety of people of different backgrounds with the common interests of singing and community involvement. Choirs inspired community learning, and socializing, while increasing member’s confidence and self-identity. Single gender choirs provided special places of support where a variety of personal issues were often vocalized and received with support and guidance. Finally, through discussions with choristers about their emotional connection to choir singing, it became apparent that the meaning that these groups have for their members is deep and complex.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study explored the role of place in shaping music practices and choir singing in the Bega Valley. This concluding chapter revisits the initial aims and summarizes how they have been met. In addition, future research possibilities will be outlined with respect to choir singing and musical practices in rural and remote regions in Australia, and elsewhere in the world.

The first aim was to document the extent and significance of musical activities in an Australian rural region, with a case study of choirs. Chapters 4 and 5 addressed this aim by outlining the extent of music in the Valley, despite its tenuous commercial market. Arts societies, community venues and music programs in public and private schools inspired numerous events and individuals to participate in music activities. An introduction to the music festivals of the region illustrated the diversity, prevalence and volunteers generated by local music interest. Interview excerpts in both Chapter 4 and 5 illustrated how community programs were generated and were sources of pride for directors and participants. In addition, the case study of choirs revealed the number of groups, the extent of their memberships and their role within the festivals and other community events. Chapter 5 revealed the multiple levels of meaning groups had for participants, as places for socializing, learning and subsequently gaining confidence and sense of self. For some these groups were vocalized as their only personal time and a ‘need’ that they had to fulfil.

The second aim was to illustrate the creativity that can be found in an Australian rural area, even one where commercial markets fail to support a coherent music scene. Chapter 2 helped set the context for this aim by describing the ways in which many previous discussions surrounding ‘creativity’ had framed creative industries and practices in a way that
marginalized collaborative and grassroots projects (see Gibson 2010; Mayes 2010). Creative industry policy-making has tended to focus on local economic benefits almost exclusively, therefore overlooking the gains in residents’ wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Chapter 4 showed how cultural and creative practices in the Valley were different from the urban orthodoxy, in two ways: 1. the main form of creativity was not commercially produced or consumed but was community-oriented and produced; and 2. that this type of cultural work was not created under the premise that it would have any particular economic incentives but was created for the sake of making music, teaching and socializing. In some cases wages were earned (school teachers, choir directors) but for most their engagements with music involved little or no formal economic exchange. They were, in short, an essential means to quality of life, rather than an opportunity for profit. Such findings parallel those of Mayes (2009, 2010), whose work on postcards demonstrated how a community produced something that the market failed to provide; in the end the practice had more meaning than economic gains. Contrasting somewhat with Mayes’ work, this thesis documented a region where the creative practice was not ‘a means to an end’ but created as art in its own right. Links to a commercial market failure were slightly more complicated. Instead of being told there was no desire to create music in the Valley for external consumption (as was the case for postcards in Ravensthorpe), the Bega Valley’s small dispersed population simply could not support a commercial market for music.

The third aim was to highlight that the particulars of place are important when considering the role of music, specifically community choir programs, in an individual’s, and/or community’s, wellbeing. Chapter 2 outlined the foundations of the way in which place has been used to understand the significance of music to cultures’ and to senses of identity, as well as mental and physical wellbeing. However a summary of the literature surrounding
choirs unveiled the lack of connection between community choir programs, the benefits of music practice to individuals’ life and place. Chapter 4 demonstrated that the particulars of place have had a vital influence on the availability of community music programs in the Valley. Musicians drawn to the region have found themselves needing to generate the programs they want themselves. As a result, the lack of a commercial market has given a small group of specialists in a rural area the freedom to create programs and productions that a larger urban centre might not have been able to support.

Those who participate in choirs, both inside and outside the Valley, may perceive similar benefits and have comparable goals but through looking at the context of the place important details are revealed. With respect to choirs specifically, Chapter 5 demonstrated how choirs in the Valley exist because of the people that have been drawn to the area who direct them and participate in them. Individuals and the surrounding social and physical environment shaped Valley choirs into inclusive, socially significant places where individuals can enjoy an increased sense of wellbeing and connection to the community. In an environment (rural Australia) where such wellbeing and connection to the community are said to be under threat – or are the cause of problems such as depression when absent (Alston 2002; Little and Panelli 2010) – the contributions of community programs, and especially choirs, to the cultural sustainability of the Bega Valley warrants greater recognition and respect.

Although similar people and talents may exist elsewhere, the individuals whose stories made up this thesis are unique to the Valley. People like Geoffrey Badger enable groups to evolve, progress and persist. The setting of the Valley and the musical community that has grown there fosters community oriented participation – no auditions necessary for these choirs. This opens participation up to all members of the community in such a way that even those who have not sung before can join. Valley choirs have a number of limitations, yet they perform at
internationally recognized festivals because of the talented and enthusiastic individuals that drive them (and because of inclusive-minded festival directors who are also committed to community music principles). All big cities have choirs and community music programs, and no doubt too do many other rural regions, but the networks of community music programs and choirs profiled here are a distinctive product of the Bega Valley.

The fourth aim of the study was to illustrate the importance of music, and creative outlets, for fostering community, a sense of identity, and overall increased sense of wellbeing for rural residents.

With limited accessibility to health services, and noticeably more susceptible to health issues, rural residents of Australia remain a marginalized population. Valley residents are divided by political, economic and social differences but through the open nature of community music programs they are able to find ways to connect with each other, and the larger community. Chapter 4 highlighted how community music productions in the Valley inspire community learning, involvement and goodwill. Interviews hinted at the meaning and significance of the programs for directors and participants. In Chapter 5 more in-depth discussions with choir members revealed a multitude of benefits, such as meeting new people, and increasing member’s sense of belonging through a collective identity.

Chapter 2 outlined how music can be used to help shape identity through consumption, memories and its ability to help perpetuate an individuals’ self-identity. Smith (1997) argued it is in the doing of music that being and becoming occurs. It is through creating music, not just passively listening to it, that an identity can transpire (Smith 1997). Results in Chapter 5 illustrated that self-identity was established through memories of choir singing and singing of a certain genre of music. Chapter 5 also outlined the way in which choir singing in Australia both challenged and reinforced traditional perspectives of Australian male identity. In both
chapters learning to sing was established as a way in which people could redefine their sense of self-identity from ‘non-singer’ to ‘singer’ (cf. Richards and Durrant 2003). Choir member’s improved singing skills gave them confidence to sing. This opened their minds to joining more formal choirs and experimenting with their voices. Choir singing was an active immersion in the doing of making music – in this case, collectively, within a community.

Music and singing positively influence wellbeing. In Chapter 4 participants relayed the pride they felt in their music and their passion for the region. Others said that engaging with music had increased their quality of life. This was also seen in discussions with choir members who made reference to the energy they felt when singing sacred choral music or navy songs. They found the music ‘uplifting’. Participants also discussed the way in which they felt connected spiritually, and physically to the music. It gave them physical ‘highs’ and ‘releases’. It was ‘good for their soul’.

This study has also made another contribution to breaking down preconceptions that rural towns are intrinsically devoid of cultural activity (cf. Gibson 2010; Mayes 2010; Gibson and Connell 2012). In so doing, it has hopefully also helped broaden the understanding of what constitutes ‘creative’ practices. Chapter 4 outlined a number of ways in which the Bega Valley is musically-inclined. A group of venues, passionate teachers and a never-ending supply of willing volunteers enabled diverse and well-established music programs and festivals, to flourish. Although the Valley is lacking in the popularly understood concept of a music ‘scene’ (focused around a commercial live music circuit), the area nevertheless gained the attention of the Australian National University’s music department. And because of a commercial market failure musicians and participants have been pushed and inspired to generate their own, arguably more meaningful, music. Music in the Bega Valley is different
than that found in the larger cities but it is not in any way less ‘creative’ because it is not commercially-viable.

Ultimately, community music provides a means to happiness and meaning in life beyond consumerism and neoliberalism (cf. Walmsley 2012), even beyond the market itself, in a largely social, non-profit cultural pursuit done for the love of it, rather than for profit.

Future Research

As with all thesis projects, I finished this project with a sense of much more that could be done. Future research should continue to push the boundaries as to what ‘creativity’ means and how it is used and engaged with as a philosophical and practical concept. I have deliberately sought to move beyond the confines of urban centres and engage with everyday practices and the meaning that is produced for individuals in sparsely populated rural regions – something that ought to happen more often in music studies. Although powerful, commercially-oriented markets reveal only one side of peoples’ interactions with music. Grassroots productions are a window into music’s deeper meanings and collaborative efforts that are inspired not through money but through a desire to create and share music.

With respect to future work specifically on choirs, research ought to continue to engage with the role that place plays in dictating the benefits and interactions that choirs enable. Choirs are powerful tools for engaging communities with creative outlets and each other. In addition further research on the differences between the way men and women experience choir singing could be pursued. A more detailed study focussing on the role that choir singing plays in the lives of men versus women may unveil the reasons why choir singing is predominantly a female activity.
Within the Bega Valley residents use music, and choir singing, as a way to socialize, learn a new skill, increase self-esteem but mostly, just for the pleasure to sing. In addition to meeting the aims, this thesis revealed the way in which the movement of professional musicians into the Valley has played a significant role in the availability of music and music programs for residents. These professionals are key assets to the community music production recorded within this thesis. Should they need/choose to leave the Valley the regions musical related productions will be significantly reduced. Music is shaped by the place in which it is made – through landscape and migrations, through materiality and daily rhythms. But the community music programs, such as the choir groups, also shape the place the Bega Valley as an enjoyable and rewarding place to live.

Bega Valley choir members are extremely passionate about their singing. They speak without trepidation of its therapeutical, spiritual, and physical benefits. Choirs are enjoyed by members and persist because of the hard work of a few dedicated music professionals. Choir singing in the Valley is made popular from festival and community performance opportunities and enthusiastic members and directors. Choirs can be seen from a utilitarian point of view as being used for educating, and integrating a community, a way to reaffirm (and possibly challenge) identities, and build confidence. But in the Bega Valley choirs are also one of the few spaces for creative expression, knowledge sharing and various forms of emotional support. Choirs in the Bega Valley do not hold auditions, yet they perform with the Canberra Symphony. Valley choirs perform alongside the best classically trained Australian musicians, yet they cannot afford to buy sheet music. The choirs of the Bega Valley are catalysts for bringing communities together, celebrating and overcoming rural isolation and inspiring personal and community growth. The Valley’s musical networks show what happens when a marginalized group of rural Australians do something constructive, for themselves, when their voices cannot otherwise be expressed through commercial music.
opportunities. They find another way, they generate ways. Through drawing new professionals to the area, by increasing enjoyment and passion for the region, by helping people socialise and cope, music has given the Bega Valley a unique richness that many country areas in Australia would envy.
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