

the South Sydney Herald

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Coping with COP 26

ENVIRONMENT

CLIVE PEARSON & MAINA TALIA

MAINA Talia is doing his PhD through Charles Sturt University on Indigenous knowledge, climate change and geopolitics. He first started going to COP conferences back in Paris in 2015. He has been to every one since – they have all been held in the northern hemisphere.

It is not easy for small island states to be heard on the international stage. Maina knows that Tuvalu is what is called a “weak actor”. It is hard to compete with the numbers of American delegates, for instance, and the vested interest of those who dislike 2030 targets (preferring 2050, or, in some cases 2060, 2070).

This year’s COP 26 conference took place in a chilly, grey Glasgow, in days gone by a site of shipbuilding and imperialism. Tuvalu – well, those eight islands only make up 26 square kilometres (the second smallest state in the world) – and the population, about 10,000. Small they may be, but they are “the

canaries in the mine” or as was suggested in their pavilion in Glasgow, “the polar bears of the Pacific”.

Tuvalu is vulnerable to rising sea levels, the acidification of oceans, as well as the increasing intensity of tropical storms. No place on any of these thin necklace-like islands is more than three metres above sea level. Government minister Simon Kofe delivered his address to the Glasgow conference while wearing a suit and tie, trousers rolled up to his knees – and standing in the ocean.

The subject matter of Maina’s thesis is “Am I Not Your *Tuakoi*, Your Neighbour?”. In a time of climate emergency, we are all neighbours to one another, and some are in more difficult situations than others. It is the kind of theme that is designed to consider climate as a common good (a theme of Pope Francis) and a matter of ethics and religion.

Most of Tuvalu is Christian – and so, neighbour/*tuakoi* picks up both Indigenous knowledge as well as Jesus’ teaching. For Muslims the care of the neighbour is also an important duty and obligation.



Hon. Minister Simon Kofe filming a video statement in Tuvalu on climate mobility. Photo: Tuvalu TV

Ever since Paris, Maina has organised a COP side event. It is always strategic. These events are designed to attract media attention for a people whose land, sovereignty, and cultural inheritance is at such risk through no fault of their own.

At COP 25, Maina designed a side event that had a number of leading island delegates address for the first time this business of being a neighbour. It must have been successful! The next day the Australian prime minister felt

obliged to make a statement in response. This year in Glasgow Maina again arranged a side event on the theme of the neighbour. It is a project that seeks to affect emotions and moral choice. At Glasgow, for the first time, he invited a Muslim leader to be on the panel.

Is it right for us in this country to go slow over meeting targets for the reduction of carbon emissions? Is it right for us to support merely the “phasing down” of coal when Australia’s percentage of the

world’s export in carbon via fossil fuels continues to grow? Is it right to ignore a neighbour – one of “our family” apparently – when there is a real possibility that Maina’s children will no longer be able to live on their home islands?

Glasgow is a long way from Tuvalu. Throughout November, the peoples of these faraway islands were paying very close attention to what the world’s “strong actors” were saying about the future implications of climate policies.

Moore’s team set for majority at Town Hall

POLITICS

SSH

THE elections for the City of Sydney Council and lord mayor were held on Saturday December 4. Returning Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore’s team appears set to control five votes in the 10-member council after securing an historic fifth term.

Cr Moore’s popular mayoral vote stood at almost 44 per cent at time of publication, a swing against

her 58 per cent victory in 2016, perhaps reflecting the mid-term departure of Kerryn Phelps and Phelps’ support for Yvonne Weldon (Unite for Sydney).

The first Aboriginal lord mayoral candidate, Ms Weldon received close to 15 per cent of the mayoral vote, as did Labor’s Linda Scott. In the election for councillors, while Moore and Scott’s numbers held steady, Ms Weldon’s slipped to around 11 per cent.

According to the ABC’s election analyst Antony Green, Jess Scully will retain her spot

on Council, as will Robert Kok, with newcomers Emelda Davis, the chairwoman of Australian South Sea Islanders, and architect William Chan, likely to join their teammates on Moore’s ticket. Councillors Philip Thalys and Jess Miller will not be elected, being at the bottom of Moore’s ticket.

Cr Scott, who has served nine years on Council, appears set to retain her spot along with newcomers Ms Weldon, Liberal’s Shauna Jarrett and the Greens’ Sylvie Ellsmore.

Ms Ellsmore represented Newtown on Marrickville Council (2012-2016) and works at Sydney University’s Sydney Policy Lab. Ms Jarrett is a Sydney lawyer and governance consultant.

The final spot is too close to call. It will depend on finishing order and then preference flows. Former ALP Waverley Councillor and gallerist Damien Minton is in the lead followed by Angela Vithoulkas (Small Business Party) and Gannon Lyndon (Liberal). Angela Vithoulkas (Small Business Party) won her place on the last Council from a similar position.



Local government elections in NSW are normally held every four years. Due to the 2020 election being postponed, however, the new Council will serve for two years and nine months.

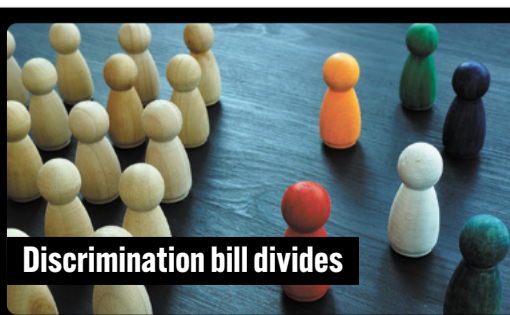
Final results are expected between December 21 and 23. See vtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/LG2101/sydney/results



Kitten concerns



Picture perfect



Discrimination bill divides

South Sydney Herald



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Local businessman gives back, boosts storytelling

LOCALS

SSH

A successful businessman who grew up in Redfern community housing and wants to give back has formed a partnership with Redfern non-profit Story Factory to recruit an Indigenous storyteller to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island young people.

Dr Alan Taylor, Executive Chairman of Clarity Pharmaceuticals, said that after growing up in the area he was excited that both he and his company could support Story Factory.

“My grandparents, after immigrating from Europe after the war, were some of the first people to move into the McKell housing commission units in the early 1960s and lived there until the '90s. And my earliest memories as a child were living on the 14th floor of the Daniel Solander building in the Waterloo housing complex.

“This experience has given me a unique understanding of the area compared to many of my peers, especially of some of the difficulties some children



Alan Taylor grew up in Redfern in community housing and is glad his company has partnered with Story Factory to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island young people with literacy and storytelling. Photo: Supplied

face through no fault of their own, whether it is a lack of resources, or not knowing where opportunities lie.”

Clarity Pharmaceuticals is a leader in developing next-generation treatments for children and adults with cancer. It is also a company “born, bred and located in Redfern,” Dr Taylor said.

Clarity will assist Story Factory to recruit an Indigenous storyteller to provide high-impact, term-length writing programs to approximately 480 students in 2022, including approximately 100 Indigenous young people.

Research has demonstrated that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have better

academic outcomes when taught by people who are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait descent or have strong links to these communities.

The latest Program for International Student Assessment data also found that Indigenous young people were on average 2.3 years behind their non-Indigenous peers in literacy. To

help reduce this gap, Story Factory has worked with more than 6,000 young Indigenous people since opening in 2012.

The new partnership with Clarity will enable Story Factory to reach more young people, improve their writing skills and find their voice.

“We are excited to be able to contribute to assisting Story Factory with providing these kids with some resources, knowledge and avenues for a new generation of leaders, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs and storytellers who will shape the future of our area,” Dr Taylor said. “Story Factory is an ideal fit for us in our community of Redfern, to support these kids to write their own stories and imagine their own bright futures.”

Both Story Factory’s and Clarity Pharmaceuticals’ head offices are located in the heart of the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

Story Factory’s Executive Director, Dr Catherine Keenan, said: “We are thrilled to partner with Clarity. Both our organisations started in Redfern and it’s wonderful to find a company so committed to supporting the local area.”

www.sydneystoryfactory.org.au

Better Read than Dead staff continue to negotiate rights

HUMAN AFFAIRS

PAUL WILSON

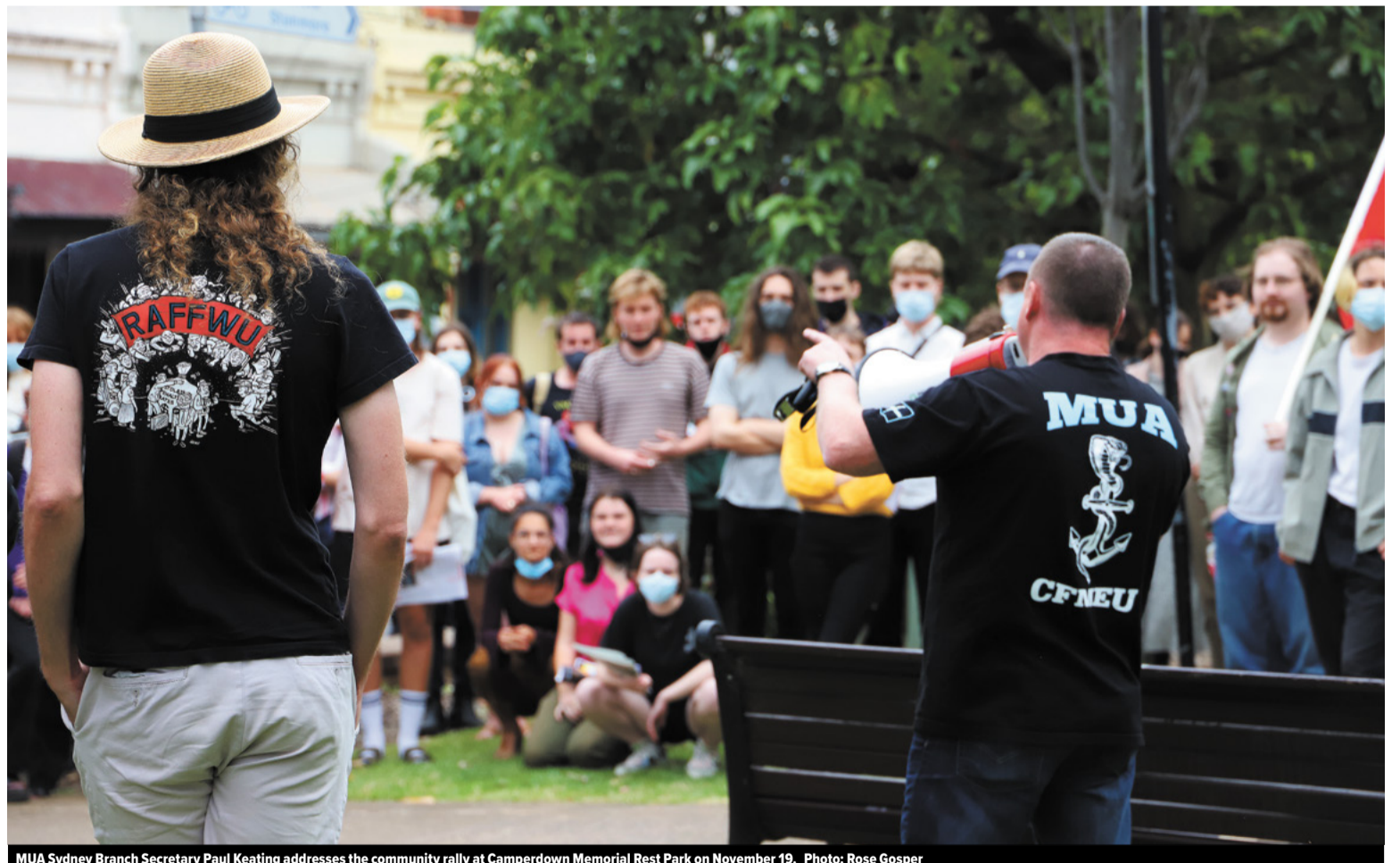
JOHN buys his books from Better Read than Dead in King Street, Newtown. The staff there help him choose Christmas and birthday presents. He supplies the ages and interests of the kids he buys for and the staff choices unfailingly delight their targets.

The staff chase up books for John, one of which was out of print. They arranged a special printing, and charged him the normal price.

Exceptional service is the standard from this decades old Sydney institution.

More than a year ago the Better Read than Dead staff wanted to secure better working conditions through a new enterprise agreement. They joined RAFFWU (Retail and Fast Food Workers Union), and entered into negotiations with the owners, who apart from the store, have significant other business interests.

Despite a promising start, discussions stalled, so legally sanctioned moderate industrial action was taken, such as no cash handling, no overtime worked, and window displays not done. At one point the owners locked the staff out. A staff member was dismissed. RAFFWU are supporting this worker, challenging the sacking in the courts.



MUA Sydney Branch Secretary Paul Keating addresses the community rally at Camperdown Memorial Rest Park on November 19. Photo: Rose Gosper

This stressed both the staff, and also the “progressive” literary community. *Overland* magazine published a letter of support from 300 published authors. Locals visited the store with pastries. A supporter set up a coffee tab of \$100 at a nearby cafe for the staff, which has been rolled over more than once.

In July it appeared an agreement had been reached. According to staff and RAFFWU the deal included re-instatement of pre-2017 Sunday rates, parental leave, a structure to deal with harassment, defined mechanisms to convert casual staff to permanent, and a small pay rise.

Business as usual resumed. Months went on, and the union continually approached the owners as to the state of play. According to RAFFWU, the owners started to back away from the July agreement.

Previous industrial action was reinstated and a Fair Work Commission hearing November 25

sought to convene a further conference December 1 in an effort to assist the parties to finalise an agreement. It is also expected the FWC will issue a new Protected Action Ballot Order so that members can secure access to further forms of industrial action, including possible strike action before Christmas.

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

Federal Member for Sydney

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

As we approach the end of the year, I want to wish you and your family a happy and healthy festive season. I hope that you get some time to relax this summer, to celebrate, and catch up with family and friends.

2021 has been another extraordinarily difficult year for all Australians. But our community has come together to support each other through a very trying two years. We have shown ourselves to be more resilient than we could have ever imagined.

Thank you to everyone who rolled up their sleeves to get vaccinated. That's meant we have been able to get back to something that resembles normality. We must remember, though, that the virus is still with us and we should continue to monitor and follow the latest health advice.

I want to thank the emergency services personnel who will be working through Christmas and New Year to help keep our community safe.

Please note that my Electorate Office will be closed between 25 December and 10 January. Centrelink Offices will be closed on 27, 28, 29 December and 3 January. Please bear in mind that Centrelink payments and reporting dates may change due to these Christmas and New Year holiday closures. This may mean that you receive your payment early.

STRONGER COMMUNITY GRANTS

Thank you to the local organisations that have submitted expressions of interest for this round of Stronger Community Grants. We have received a large volume of EOIs and will provide applicants with an update before the end of the year.

ELECTORATE OFFICE

My electorate office provides support with Centrelink, Veterans' Affairs, Medicare, Immigration, NBN and other federal matters. **If you require assistance, then please don't hesitate to call us on 9379 0700 or email Tanya.Plibersek.MP@aph.gov.au**

TAX HELP

The Australian Tax Office are offering clients tax help. If you are seeking assistance, please call 13 28 61 and ask for virtual tax help. Call centre staff will check your eligibility and match you with a volunteer who will lodge your return.

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

Federal Member for Sydney

1A Great Buckingham St, Redfern NSW 2016

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Promising results for University of Sydney bionic eye

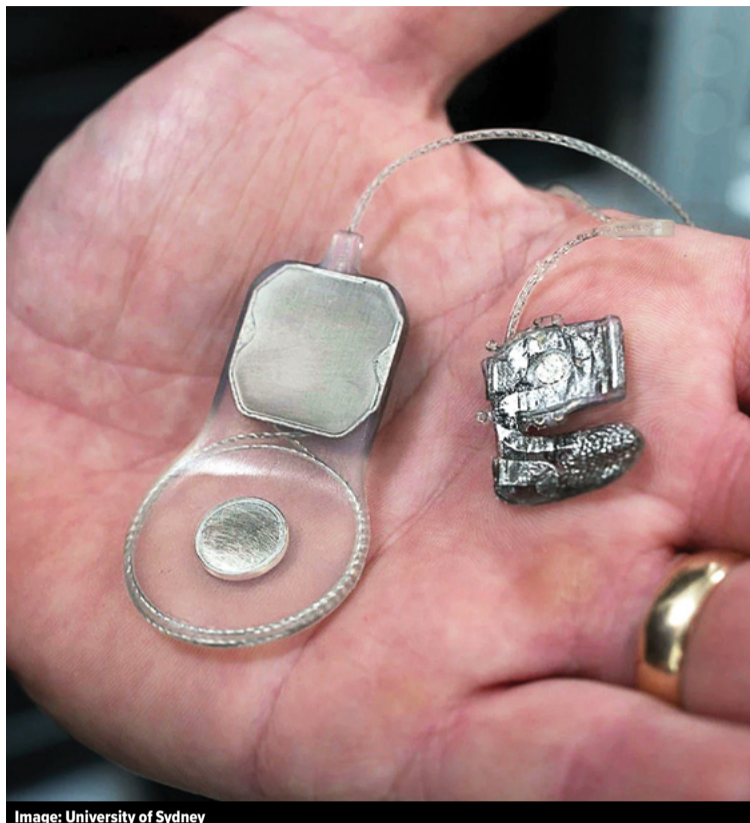


Image: University of Sydney

SPONSORED

MARK SCOTT

A bionic eye being developed by a team of biomedical researchers at the University of Sydney and UNSW has shown to be safe and stable for long-term implantation in a three-month study, paving the way towards human trials.

The Phoenix99 Bionic Eye is an implantable system, designed to restore a form of vision to patients living with severe vision impairment and blindness caused by degenerative diseases, such as retinitis pigmentosa. The device has two main components which need to be implanted: a stimulator attached to the eye and a communication module positioned under the skin behind the ear.

Published in *Biomaterials*, the researchers used a sheep model to observe how the body responds and heals when implanted with the device, with the results allowing for further refinement of the surgical procedure. The biomedical research team is now confident the device could be trialled in human patients.

The team will now apply for ethics approval to perform clinical trials in human patients, as they continue to develop and test advanced stimulation techniques.

The Phoenix99 Bionic Eye works by stimulating the retina – a thin stack of neurones lining the back of the eye. In healthy eyes, the cells in one of the layers turn incoming light into electrical messages which are sent to the brain. In some retinal diseases, the cells responsible for this crucial conversion degenerate, causing vision impairment. The system bypasses these malfunctioning cells by stimulating the remaining cells directly, effectively tricking the brain into believing that light was sensed.

“Importantly, we found the device has a very low impact on the neurons required to ‘trick’ the brain. There were no unexpected reactions from the tissue around the device and we expect it could safely remain in place for many years,” said Mr Samuel Eggenberger, a biomedical engineer who is completing his doctorate with Head of School of Biomedical Engineering Professor Gregg Suaning.

“Our team is thrilled by this extraordinary result, which gives us confidence to push on towards human trials of the device. We hope that through this technology, people living with profound vision loss from degenerative retinal disorders may be able to regain a useful sense of sight.

“This breakthrough comes from combining decades of experience and technological breakthroughs in the field of implantable electronics,” said Professor Suaning.

How the bionic eye works:

- A patient is implanted with the Phoenix99. A stimulator is positioned on the eye and a communication module implanted behind the ear.
- A very small camera attached to glasses captures the visual scene in front of the wearer. The images are processed into a set of stimulation instructions.
- The instructions are sent wirelessly through the skin to the communication module of the prosthesis.
- The implant decodes the wireless signal and transfers the instructions to the stimulation module, which delivers electrical impulses to the neurons of the retina.
- The electrical impulses, delivered in patterns matching the images recorded by the camera, trigger neurons which forward the messages to the brain, where the signals are interpreted as a vision of the scene.



Authorised by Vice-Chancellor and Principal Prof. Mark Scott.

Enquiries: 9351 2000
info.centre@sydney.edu.au

Where do your brands fit on Oxfam's Naughty or Nice list?

HUMAN AFFAIRS

SSH

MAJOR fashion brands in Australia, such as Just Jeans, Lorna Jane, Myer and Peter Alexander, must be open about how and where they manufacture their clothes to help lift the women who make them out of poverty, Oxfam declared ahead of the Black Friday sales and Christmas.

As Australians start their Christmas shopping in earnest, the international development and human rights organisation has released its updated Naughty or Nice list, which congratulates brands that have

made commitments around living wages and calls out those that can do better.

Oxfam Australia Chief Executive Lyn Morgain said it was particularly unfortunate that some brands had failed to make commitments to ensure the payment of a living wage during the pandemic – a time when the industry has grown yet many garment workers have lost their jobs.

A living wage means enough money is earned to cover basic essentials for a family including food, housing, healthcare, clothing, transport, education and some money for unexpected events.

“Sunlight is the best disinfectant, which is why transparency around issues of power, whether

business or politics, is so important,” Ms Morgain said.

“Three major clothing companies in Australia – Lorna Jane, Myer and The Just Group – have failed to take the basic step of publishing key information about where they manufacture their clothes.”

While those three companies have found themselves on the Naughty list, others have taken positive steps towards backing up their commitment to a living wage. Those on the Nice list this year are Best & Less, Big W, Bonds, City Chic, Cotton On, Country Road, Dangerfield, David Jones, Forever New, Gorman, H&M, Kmart, Mosaic brands (including Rivers and Katies), and Target.



cartoon: norrie maAy-welby

Local artists express community concerns

EDITORIAL

BLAK DOUGLAS

THE inaugural *Blak & Blu* art award for ink on A4 paper nears its official launch.

Inspired by 19th-century Kwatkwat (north-eastern Victoria) artist Tommy McRae, whose sketchbooks feature drawings of birds, hunting scenes, dances and corroborees, squatters and streetscapes, *Blak & Blu* is a grass-roots community event nurturing social comment.

We all know the value of a great doodling on paper, whether it be a rough idea, a brainwave transferred to a coaster or a designated party activity. A drawing that feels good makes one feel proud. Some may be able to create an A4 drawing in under a minute, whereas others chip away at a piece over consecutive evenings after dinner. Whichever, we encourage the practice and choose to celebrate the commitment through this prize.

Co-devised by artist Blak Douglas and the reverend-editor Andrew Collis, the concept evolved over coffee in downtown

Cadigal Country – Redfern. Friendship between Andrew and Blak had developed over previous years through a mutual love of art. This would lead to Blak’s seasonal cartoon entry to the *South Sydney Herald* – a strip featuring the wondrous adventures of Redfern Park’s own celebrity ibis named Gunyadyu. Throughout the course of his tenure, Gunyadyu covered a diverse series of topical subjects. From politics to Christmas, one would find the cheeky bird in all sorts of predicaments.

Cartooning – the breeding ground for our earliest creativity. For myself, it began with dinosaurs, trucks, and then caricatures. The latter became a distinct focus, most likely prompted by my fascination with the crossword and cartoon strip page in the major papers. I would fastidiously collect them, glue them into a scrapbook and file the books as though they were annual accounting ledgers. I would practise until I could reproduce the characters as if I were the artist I admired. Of course, once I had mastered my favourite characters, then a tailored cartoon strip could develop.

Receiving entries from community members spread throughout the SSH’s demographic has been a veritable “lucky dip”. The first year has demonstrated a surprising variety and various age groups. Community concerns include First Nations and climate justice, issues around gentrification, homelessness and affordable housing, racism, and the pandemic.

Figuring we may attract efforts from our junior community artists, I sought the generosity of Parkers Framing & Art Supplies who agreed to donate a fantastic artist’s pack. This shall be awarded to our “youth category” winner while the main award of \$1,000 shall be granted to our chosen adult artist.

We are honoured to have the commitment of an extraordinarily talented artist and multiple Archibald Prize Finalist – Kathrin Longhurst. Kathrin shall announce the award recipients at the launch. We look forward to seeing you there. SSH

Blak & Blu
December 11, 2021, 2-4pm
The Orchard Gallery
56a Raglan St Waterloo
@theorchardgalleryau

Will LAHC’s redevelopment profit pay for Aboriginal affordable housing?

URBAN DESIGN

GEOFF TURNBULL

THE NSW government’s Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) has a policy of trying to deliver 30 per cent social housing paid for by the 70 per cent private housing in its redevelopments.

LAHC has stuck with its 30:70 formula in the inner city against community and Council pressure to increase the quantity of social and affordable housing in these developments. In Waterloo South, both Council and the Independent Advisory Group undertook work

showing that more housing can be delivered. The Department of Planning Industry and Environment (DPIE) is checking this feasibility for Waterloo South.

On the Elizabeth Street PCYC site, Council commissioned a Feasibility Analysis by AEC Group to support its view that the site could provide more social and affordable housing. AEC found that at normal developer margins of 20 per cent the site could deliver 7.5 per cent additional affordable housing than 30:70 proposed. During the Central Sydney Planning Committee (CSPC) discussion, the NSW Government Architect argued

that because developer risk is lower on a government-owned site the original 10 per cent affordable housing Council and CSPC proposed should be possible.

If DPIE sticks with 30 per cent combined social and affordable housing because that is government policy, Redfern will not get all the housing that the site can deliver and LAHC will make a profit it can use elsewhere. As delivery costs are cheaper in western Sydney it is likely to see additional housing delivered there rather than in the inner city.

One place this LAHC profit could be allocated in Redfern and Waterloo is for Aboriginal

Christmas can be bittersweet

FAITH

DANIELLE HEMSWORTH-SMITH

THIS year, as we emerge from the lockdowns and restrictions of the pandemic, I am really excited about Christmas. But as I go about my work, and am finally catching up with family and friends that I haven’t seen for a long time, I am also feeling the losses of the last couple of years more than ever. I am not alone in this.

My first experience of deep pain and sadness at Christmas was when I was 11. My great-grandmother died on Christmas Eve. She was well into her 90s and many would say had a good life. But this tiny and somewhat proper English lady we visited every weekend, to share a feast of stale SAO biscuits with plastic cheese and ice-cream in lemonade, was all too suddenly gone from our lives. And Christmas that year was a lot less sweet.

My next vivid experience of pain and sadness at Christmas was many years later when I miscarried twins just a few days before Christmas. Normally we spend Christmas Eve at church, but that year we spent it at home. We couldn’t face the smiles, good cheer or the story about a new baby coming into the world. I was also deeply angry with God. Christmas Day was a painful wash of simply going through the motions with a smile plastered on. Pretending we were okay in front of our family and our two small boys, who knew, but did not really understand, our pain.

Christmas is not always happy. Despite the carols and the lights, the parties and the presents, my experience, and perhaps yours too, is that Christmas often comes with sadness.

I don’t know the sadness that you carry but I’m guessing, for most of us, there is something. Particularly this year after two years of pandemic.

This year many of us, myself included, don’t really know what to do with Christmas as it is a real mix of bitter and sweet.

We’re looking forward to seeing the ones we love, laughing and celebrating but, at the same time, there is so much we have lost over the past two years and so much we have missed out on. We’re looking forward to the carols and the presents and way too much Christmas cheer but, at the same time, we are exhausted and overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to figure out where to from here and what will happen next.

The comforting, yet all too often forgotten, truth about the Christmas story is that it was written about people who would have felt very similarly to how we are feeling right now.

Jesus was born into a very difficult time in history. Mary and Joseph, and all their community were oppressed by occupying forces. These young, expectant parents were forced to travel and then give birth to their beautiful baby boy a long way from their home and close family. I am guessing that their extreme joy at the safe arrival of the Christ Child was overshadowed by their fear, uncertainty and grief from all they were experiencing. I also suspect they were pretty upset with God, despite their relief that their little family was okay.

So, what did they do in that bittersweet moment? It seems they took strength from the wonder of the new life in their midst, and shared that joy with the many strangers who were with them – the shepherds, the magi and even possibly the animals who sheltered with them. And they accepted comfort, friendship and hospitality from them in return.

An unlikely community of strangers shared both the joy and the sadness of that first Christmas together. May we do the same this year. SSH

The Rev. Danielle Hemsworth-Smith is the minister at Paddington Uniting Church. Blue Christmas Service on Wednesday December 8, 7pm.

Paddington Uniting Church, 395 Oxford Street Paddington, and livestreamed to the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT Facebook page: www.facebook.com/unitingchurchnswact

affordable housing to keep a diverse and viable Aboriginal community in the inner city. The feasibility figures show that 10 per cent affordable housing requested by the Aboriginal community could be self-funded by LAHC, even though in the past groups like REDWatch have argued it should be funded by Treasury.

In considering LAHC’s Redfern redevelopment, Council initially applied its policy that 10 per cent of the affordable housing be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, but this only delivers 2-3 homes. In response to this problem, Council changed its recommendation to DPIE and LAHC so that 10 per cent of the entire redevelopment should be Aboriginal housing.

Council is also taking a non-planning approach to the problem. *A note on Housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* for the Elizabeth Street LAHC Discussion at the November 15 Council, revealed that Council funds a dedicated Aboriginal Affordable Housing Engagement Coordinator to work with Community housing providers to increase the number of Aboriginal tenants. As a result, 43 per cent of the 160 social and affordable housing units in the 11 Gibbons Street development were allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households.

It is time for the NSW government to do its bit. SSH

Geoff Turnbull is the Co-Spokesperson for REDWatch.

The Review

Arts & Culture in Your Neighbourhood

Shine a light on inner-city life

MUSIC

ANDREW COLLIS

REDFERN-BASED duo Boy Torch will join Youth Group's Toby Martin for *Local Stories Live* on Saturday December 11. The online concert, a fundraiser for the *South Sydney Herald*, promises original song-writing and spirited performances in celebration of diverse and resilient community.

Boy Torch is Joe Fenech (vocals) and Edmond Kairouz (vocals, acoustic and electric guitars). The two have enjoyed a close working relationship since the mid-1990s.

Their friendship was forged in the heat of Sydney's live music scene – pub-rock, folk-rock and indie-pop. Kairouz played guitar with various acts including local legend Perry Keyes (with whom he still plays). Fenech was a budding songwriter.

"Now I bake the cake (lyrics and melody) and Edmond adds the icing (dynamic intros, solos and beats)," Fenech smiles, grateful for the long-term support and musical acuity of his collaborator.

Kairouz also brings a keen interest in home recording. "I have a simple setup," he says. "We are aiming to complete a project in early 2022."

Boy Torch was formerly known as the Torchsong Country Soul



Boy Torch is Edmond Kairouz and Joe Fenech. For a chance to win a signed CD, tell us the name of the legendary shoe repair shop on Redfern Street – email editor@ssh.com.au Photo: Joe Fenech

Band, an eight-piece ensemble featuring vocalist Marie Byrne. The group released an eponymous EP in 2007, then an album of folk-, country- and soul-inspired originals in 2011 before Byrne sojourned to Ireland (she has since returned and is now a full-time mum to two wonderful girls).

"A big band was a great

experience," Fenech reflects. "I learned so much. It's a challenge now [to sing the songs], but easier being just the two of us. We can select material that suits us and our voices.

"We'll play a few new songs [at the fundraiser] – some folk and rockabilly, a little grungier, but still rootsy – guitars and vocal harmonies. Think Everly Brothers

meets Neil Young – stories about what we see and feel."

What do the "boys" value most about growing up and living in South Sydney? "It's multicultural and people show care for neighbours," Fenech says. "Most people will look you in the eye."

Gentrification is a big issue, of course. "I hope the songs bear witness to life and change, with humour as well as criticism," Fenech says.

Kairouz nods. "The songs are about who we are," he says.

Local Stories Live

Saturday December 11, from 6pm.

Join via Zoom.

www.southsydneyherald.com.au/local-stories-live



LOCALSTORIESLIVE



Georgia Spain who won the Sulman Prize in 2021 for her work 'Getting down or falling up' features in an episode of *Talking with Painters*. Photo: Georgia Spain/Talking with Painters

Painters shed light on lockdown drear

ART

MARJORIE LEWIS-JONES

WITH galleries closed during lockdown, I hankered after colour and beauty and a sense that the world was larger than the humdrum knick-knacks I could see in my house.

For some reason, online exhibitions (though varied) quickly fatigued me. Eventually, I stumbled upon Maria Stoljar's *Talking with Painters* – and discovered a much-needed source of distraction and illumination.

Stoljar interviews Australian painters for her podcast and YouTube channel – and I've now listened to and watched more than 10 of the many episodes she's created over the last four years.

I started with Tasmanian-based painter Georgia Spain who spoke about winning the Sulman Prize in 2021 with her painting "Getting down or falling up" – a strikingly energetic work depicting people caught at tipping point, limbs akimbo.

Less than a year earlier, Spain was one of five to receive the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship. She also won the Women's Art Prize Tasmania in the same week she won the Sulman. She's a singer too and released her debut full-length album *Trouble Isn't Something You Can Hold* in 2019, a response to the environmental crisis and personal tragedy, the latter the devastating loss of her older sister.

Natasha Walsh is another emerging artist who talks articulately with Stoljar about her creative process and her struggle with depression. As well as winning three prestigious art awards; the Kilgour Prize, the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship and the Mosman Art Prize, she's been a finalist in the Archibald Prize for the last three years with self-portraits.

Walsh said her main interest lies in transforming materials like wax, copper and marble into ideas. She loves how copperwork changes depending on how it's lit and how wax can be made to look like flesh.

"I was sitting with my grandfather as he was dying and holding his hands and his skin was so fragile

and I wanted a material that could evoke that," she said.

Stolja helpfully provides online links for major topics, art movements, techniques and quirky facts each artist touches on in their talk. For example, in a recent episode featuring Kim Leutwyler there is a link to Gambelin's "Torrit Grey" because Leutwyler speaks of craving 'this paint – a different grey each year, that's made from recycled pigments.

I also really enjoyed getting a peek inside Wendy Sharpe's studio in St Peters and hearing her talk about her 2018 show *Paris Windows* at King Street Gallery on William. Marc Etherington was also endearing, especially when speaking about the imaginative breadth he sees in his children and how this inspires him.

Despite the radiance these interviews showered on my lockdown dreariness and times since, I have yet to pick up a paintbrush! Still, I'm pretty sure *Talking with Painters* will appeal to other people who *don't* paint and also those who do.

talkingwithpainters.com

Scholarship helps Grace excel on strings

MUSIC

SSH

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD Grace Hu fell in love with the violin when she was just 5.

Over the past eight years, she has achieved many of her goals but the talented teenager has plenty more in mind.

"I have placed third in two violin competitions, I am currently working on grade 7 violin, and I am now a Sydney Youth Orchestra ambassador," says the young Redfern resident.

"I would love to be in a prestigious orchestra or win a large violin competition. I'm currently completing the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) so another goal is to complete the AMUS (Associate in Music) and LMUS (Licentiate in Music) in future years."

Grace credits her mum with introducing her to the violin and her love of music.

"When my mum was a young girl, she didn't have the opportunity to play the violin or any instrument at all. She has always loved the violin and believes playing an instrument is good for children's brain development. I'm very lucky to have been introduced to the violin at such a young age, which created a strong foundation towards my future playing."

Grace has faced a number of challenges in her playing journey and is grateful for the support she has received along the way.

"There have been times where I have felt like I should give up or take a break, but all roads have ups and downs and, in the end, I have always continued with the violin as it has been such a special part of my life.

"I have had six tutors throughout



Grace Hu is one of 78 children (aged 7 to 18) across NSW and the ACT who have been awarded Variety – the Children's Charity scholarships in 2021 to pursue their sporting and artistic dreams. Photo: Supplied

the years, and all have been such a great help with whatever I was working on at that moment. My family has also been a large motivation for me. They have pushed me at the times I felt discouraged, particularly my mum. They have helped me travel to competitions, helped me practice when I was younger and have always been such a big support."

Grace is in Year 8 at St George Girls High School and her current violin tutor is Jonathan Hendl who teaches in Waterloo.

She was thrilled to receive a Variety Heart Scholarship in 2021.

"The scholarship will enable me to attend violin competitions, concerts and auditions in order to further my skill and my passion overall. I am extremely passionate about violin and I am so happy to experience the journey without hardships or financial problems to block my dreams and goals."

www.variety.org.au/nsw/variety-heart-scholarships

The Reviews

Theatre Review by Catherine Skipper



The Boomkak Panto

Writer: Virginia Gay

Directors: Richard Carroll,
Virginia Gay

Belvoir Upstairs Theatre

November 20 – December 23, 2021

It's wonderful to have the Belvoir stage and actors back in action again and despite, or because of, months of penalising shutdown, making an explosive return with the musical comedy *The Boomkak Panto*. From the moment the cast rockets onto the stage with their opening number, dressed in glittering gold from shoulder to toe, flouncing fringes and brandishing ribbons, we are ready to enjoy a night of exuberant fun and cultural subversion.

Boomkak, a rural backwater beautifully evoked by Michael Hankins' faded backdrop with realistic dusty weeds bordering the once active tomato sauce factory, is facing a crisis. A Big Developer has set his sights on the small community and the townspeople unimpressed by the dubious advantages of "redevelopment", decide to fight back. However, challenging BG (a sartorially up-market Rob Johnson) requires money, and the Crisis Committee set up to deal with this intrusion into their harmonious way of life, have to find some, and quickly.

A suggestion from one resting actor and tree-changer, John (Toby Truslove) longing for the limelight is to stage a "panto". Unbelievably, despite a comical and probably true catalogue of all that is wrong with pantomimes, engagingly delivered by John's partner, Alison (Virginia Gay), the committee enthusiastically takes up the idea. Alison is nevertheless compliant and from here on the old-fashioned pantomime with its bad jokes, slapstick, star-crossed lovers (traditionally with a boy-hero who is really a girl) and Dame Cranky is repurposed, although still sprawling and deliberately chaotic, as a moral fable for the land of Oz.

The contradictions of the little town are highlighted in a comedic way. The Committee unhesitatingly asks avuncular First Nations Cultural Consultant Darren (Billy McPherson) whether it is culturally acceptable to stage a panto but meets an obstacle in the form of prohibitive council regulations when Darren dons his other hat, 2IC to the Mayor. Widowed Iranian refugee, Pania (Deborah Galanos), thankful for her adopted country and adopted into the community, nevertheless pressures her daughter into a relationship with gawky Butch (again Johnson) whom Pania shamelessly covets as a true blue Aussie lad.

There are internal threats to the harmony of Boomkak and true blue Butch is one of them. While his unexamined egoism is comical, his unexamined racist and sexist attitudes would be laughable if they were not so destructive to both community wellbeing and individual happiness. An equally serious threat to community health is the outsider who chooses to leave – depriving the town of the opportunity for a richer, more diverse social interaction. The vulnerable but courageous Zoe (Zoe Terakes) – bullied by Butch and rejected by Yasmin unable to face the consequences of being an outsider too – sees a new life in Sydney as salvation.

It is a fairy tale, and the villains loudly booed by the willing audience meet a bad end and the queer AF love story triumphs as we know it will from the beginning. In the meantime, entertained by the jokes about theatrical merchandising, the menace of being sloshed with white paint by a disoriented Dame, an hilarious rendition of "I left no ring with her" speech from *Twelfth Night*, the subtle musical punctuation of Hamed Sadeghi, new Eddie Perfect songs and actors enjoying themselves, the audience will have a great night on the town.

» theatre@ssh.com.au

Film Review by Lindsay Cohen



Nitram

Director: Justin Kurzel

Starring: Caleb Landry Jones,
Judy Davis, Anthony LaPaglia

Genre: Martin is backwards

Nitram is about Martin Bryant, the Port Arthur massacre killer. So unlike most films, you know how it ends.

And that's what makes *Nitram* so different and so fascinating.

It's the tension from observing all the sliding doors moments, when if one person had just done something differently, or if the system was more attuned to his needs or the drugs he was taking were more effective. Indeed, it's all those things that almost make you feel some sympathy for a severely mentally challenged individual who had no mechanisms to cope with societal norms.

The relationship with his parents is just as fascinating. By casting Judy Davis and Anthony LaPaglia as Bryant's parents, quality actors and specialists in deep, complex and harrowing portrayals, their inability to ultimately manage

Bryant's disturbed personality is all the more poignant.

Yet while *Nitram* may be full of insights, Bryant's motivation to do what he did is unexplainable despite his condition. His life is so unrelatable to almost anything nearly all of us have ever experienced, so *Nitram* ultimately is not teaching any lessons but only providing opportunities to observe.

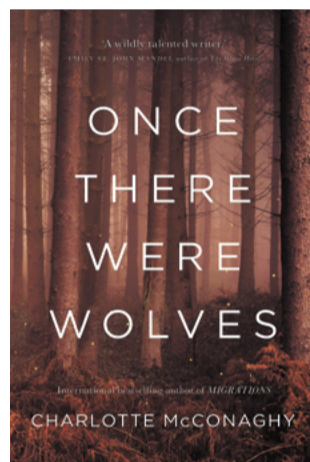
Disappointingly in many respects, *Nitram* has been made for a streaming service (Stan), though I saw it on the big screen. That's a shame because it means the film is less accessible, the emotions not as stark and the shocking brilliance of the actors, including Texan Caleb Landry Jones as Bryant, less evident.

But if that's what it took to get the film made, then it is worth it.

Rating: 4½ movie stars.

» film@ssh.com.au

Book Review by Marjorie Lewis-Jones



Once There Were Wolves
Hamish Hamilton/Penguin Books
Charlotte McConaghy
\$32.99

Sydney-based Charlotte McConaghy is one of the most exciting and accomplished writers of literary fiction in Australia today. She weaves skilful storytelling with a fiery passion to convey the urgent environmental issues of the moment – and yet never resorts to being didactic.

McConaghy's international bestseller *Migrations* has been translated into over 20 languages and Claire Foy (*The Crown*) has been cast to star in its film adaptation. *Once There Were Wolves* looks set to follow a similar trajectory.

Where *Migrations* featured Franny, a reckless and driven environmentalist following "the last of the birds", in *Once There Were Wolves* we meet Inti, a biologist, who is compelled to reintroduce 14 grey wolves back into the Scottish Highlands by her belief that "rewilding" the area will save the dying forest and restore the lost ecosystem.

Inti Flynn has mirror-touch synaesthesia: a rare syndrome in which her brain causes her body to feel the sensations she's sees. Inti's twin sister Aggie, who has accompanied her to Scotland and who used to be Inti's main defender, has stopped speaking.

The pair encountered a quirky upbringing (in the forests of British Columbia with their

survivalist father, and in Sydney with their straight talking, crime writing mother), and have come through challenging personal circumstances with scars that make Inti prickly and suspicious. These traits are not helpful in convincing the townsfolk that the wolf project is not destined to destroy their farms and livelihoods. Inti and Aggie are also impossible to tell apart which yields some just-on-the-edge-of-believable plot twists.

Inti falls into a relationship of sorts with Duncan, the town's policeman, who walks a challenging line in maintaining law and order in the region. When a wife abuser is reported missing and presumed dead people blame the wolves, but Inti is quick to defend them. Tensions in the town escalate and it is not certain they will be resolved without further bloodshed.

While struggling with how not to spook the wolves, Inti also ponders what it would mean if humans did not assume dominion over other creatures, at times referring back to her father's thoughts on the issue.

"My father used to say the world turned wrong when we started separating ourselves from the wild, when we stopped being one with the rest of nature, and sat apart. He said we might survive this mistake if we found a way to rewild ourselves. But I don't know how to do that when our existence frightens the creatures we must reconnect with.

"I would give anything not to frighten them; it makes me so sad. And yet the truth is that their fear of us keeps them safe from us."

If you care about the environment and stories that can convey the urgency of our predicament, read *Once There Were Wolves* then circle back to read *Migrations*. You won't regret it.

I am itching to see what kind of wild and astonishing creature McConaghy will create next.

» books@ssh.com.au

Book Review by Catherine DeMayo



Crossroads

Jonathan Franzen
HarperCollins, \$32.99

One reviewer commented that Jonathan Franzen, whose 2001 novel *The Corrections* catapulted him to literary fame, writes long novels about small subjects. *Crossroads*, at some 600 pages, fits the first part of that; the breadth and depth of the questions it explores, however, set it apart from Franzen's previous works.

Like its predecessors, *Crossroads* follows a cast of seemingly ordinary characters, alternating between subjects and avoiding a traditional protagonist. Its characters are five members of the Hildebrandt family in New Prospect, a middle-class suburb of Chicago.

Russ, a church minister, is proud to have marched against the Vietnam War, agitated for Black Americans' civil rights and forged links with Navajo Indians. He faces a growing sense of irrelevancy, heightened dramatically when the charismatic youth pastor usurps his leadership of Crossroads, the touchy-feely and wildly popular youth group at his church.

Russ cares deeply about the urban, impoverished Black church that his congregation supports through donations and working bees, but his weekly ministry trips also serve as cover for the lust he feels for Frances, a pretty young widow who joins the team. Russ has lost interest in his wife Marion, and treats her with a disdain obvious to their teenage children. He is ashamed of "her sorry hair, her unavailing makeup, her seemingly self-spiting choice of dress".

Marion and the three eldest Hildebrandt offspring also feature, in alternating narratives. Set in the 1970s, beginning a few days before Christmas, *Crossroads* makes frequent use of long, detailed backstory.

The issues raised in *Crossroads* are broad and compelling. Russ, whatever one thinks of his personal hypocrisy, is genuine in his search for ways of supporting impoverished minorities when some of their members are unabashedly hostile. In one of his finer moments, he confronts a group of angry Navajo men and addresses their anger not by denial, but by inviting them to visit the youth group and explain the reasons behind their rage.

Perry, 15, struggles with drug use, but also with genuine questions as to how he can be a better person. Clem, while staunchly anti-war, is painfully aware that by avoiding the draft through university, he is condemning someone less privileged to serve in his place. Sixteen-year-old Becky experiences a close personal relationship to God that her own father finds elusive.

Marion visits a psychiatrist under cover of exercise class, and gradually reveals the traumas of her past (sexual abuse, an illegal abortion, a stay in a mental hospital). Partway through the book, she steps out of her downtrodden role in a dramatic metamorphosis.

Crossroads is intended to be the first in a trilogy. Franzen succeeds in creating characters whose inconsistencies, flaws and doubts make them recognisably, albeit infuriatingly, human. Whether he really needed 600 pages of sometimes excruciating detail to do so, however, is debatable; this reviewer believes *Crossroads* would benefit from judicious pruning.

» books@ssh.com.au

Volunteers' News

PAT CLARKE

LAST December, when I wrote about easing of restrictions, who would have thought we'd be expecting the same again this year. The information below is dependent upon any updates or changes due to the latest Covid-19 Omicron variant.

Further Covid restrictions will ease when NSW reaches 95 per cent double vaccination or on **December 15**, whichever comes first. **Masks** will only be required on public transport, on planes, at airports and indoors front-of-house hospitality staff who are not fully vaccinated. Masks are no longer required in outdoor settings. Covid-19 Safe check-ins will also be reduced to hospitals, nursing homes and aged care facilities, pubs, small bars, clubs and nightclubs.

For full information on these and other new regulations see: www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/easing-covid-19-restrictions/opening-in-december

Sydney Festival – January 6-30

New Director Olivia Ansell follows a long line of distinguished Sydney Festival Directors for next year's Festival, and has curated a striking line-up of theatre, dance, music, arts and the unusual at various venues in the City and suburbs. There are also free events for children and adults.

www.sydneystival.org.au

Vigil: Songs for Tomorrow, Barangaroo Reserve – January 25, 8pm until dawn

This is the fourth Vigil as part of the Sydney Festival, on the eve of January 26. Due to Covid-safety it is now ticketed, and attendees need to book a ticket in advance.

You can register your interest to attend now, for January: www.sydneystival.org.au/events/vigil-songs-for-tomorrow

'Local Stories Live' Online Concert & SSH Fundraiser – Saturday December 11, 6pm

Thanks to the success of last year's virtual evening, we are online again for another fun-filled evening. As advised last month, singer-songwriter and music historian Toby Martin will perform songs from his latest album, *I Felt the Valley Lifting*. Toby will be joined by Redfern-based folk-country duo Boy Torch (see page 6 for our interview with the boys!). This is our major fundraiser for the year, so if you can't join us, your donation, no matter how small, will be a great help. Donations gratefully received:

www.southsydneyherald.com.au/local-stories-live

Thank you to our volunteers for 2021! Thank you to *South Sydney Herald's* wonderful volunteers. We look forward to seeing you all in 2022. Season's best wishes to all our contributors, distributors, editors, advertisers, readers and friends for a joyous holiday period and a safe, healthy and disaster-free New Year.

» volunteers@ssh.com.au



Tyson Brown. Photo: Supplied

A very personal trainer

STEVE TURNER

LOCAL Tyson Brown takes a very personal approach to training his clients. His training takes two forms. One is online training, where programs are comprehensive and personalised. Tyson's clients are from all over Australia as well as overseas. The other is training clients at Sydney Park in Alexandria.

Programs vary to suit the needs of the individual. Components include cardiovascular fitness, weight training, body shaping and nutrition. From the outset, Tyson establishes a high level of communication between himself and his clients during classes and in between.

"Regular communication is vital," he says. "I am available at any time to explain any component of a client's

program, and to tweak if necessary. It is of major importance to set my clients up to maintain their long-term health, even after they finish their course of lessons with me."

Check out Tyson's website at www.tysonthetrainer.com

New Hall of Fame legends

Cricket star Dennis Lillee and swimming hero Ian Thorpe have been elevated to legend status in the Sport Australia Hall of Fame. The pair join 42 other Australian sporting icons, including Evonne Goolagong-Cawley, Sir Donald Bradman, Dawn Fraser, Bart Cummings and Cathy Freeman, in receiving Sport Australia's highest honour. Athletes must be retired for at least 15 years before being considered for elevation to legend status.

Lillee, whose stellar 70-test career ended in 1984, was inducted into the Hall of Fame the following year but has had to wait another 37 years to be recognised as a legend. When he left international cricket, Lillee was the leading test wicket-taker with 355 and his tally remains as the fourth-highest for an Australian, only behind Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath and Nathan Lyon. "We had some great teams during my career, but more than anything, they were all great blokes. They were like family," Lillee said.

The most successful male Olympian in Australia's history, Thorpe's feats in the pool saw him placed into the Hall of Fame in 2008. In nine years of elite swimming, Thorpe won five Olympic gold medals and he set 23 world records. As a 17 year-old, Thorpe was the star of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, claiming three gold and two silver medals in front of his home crowd. "It's an honour and a privilege to be part of a group of people who have shaped the Australian sporting and cultural identity around the world," Thorpe said.



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