

In full voice: the irrepressible Lyn Eales



The irrepressible Lyn Eales enjoying some down time in her 'girl shed' at the back of her Warrnambool home.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] L
[/dropcap]yn Eales is a performer, a pacifist, an activist and an organiser; a leader, a doer, a mentor and a singer; a lover, a friend, a sister and a daughter; a mother, a grandmother and a mate – no wonder she is hard to pin down.

It takes days – no, weeks – for us to finally find a mutually agreeable time to sit and talk for a couple of hours, tucked away in Lyn's "girl shed" behind her Warrnambool home where she retreats at the end of the day to savour a glass of champagne, a cigarette and some down time.

It is raining, but the shed has a pot belly stove, some comfy

chairs and is made cosy with feathers, ephemera and an eclectic array of artwork that mirror Lyn's gregarious personality. This is a woman who is not afraid to be seen, who is comfortable in her skin and who oozes that undefinable mix of qualities that add up to charisma.

"I am the daughter of publicans. People and music have always been a part of my life," Lyn says, and it explains so much.

Her parents, Val and Lyal, ran the Hawkesdale Hotel for many years. Like so many country pubs, the place was a catch-all for those in need of a laugh, a drink, a listening ear, or maybe a bit of each.

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"There was always music in the dining room, always," Lyn says. "Something was always going on: people playing guitar, playing piano, dropping in and playing an impromptu concert."

The little Lyn couldn't wait to be part of it.

"I remember singing for the CWA ladies luncheon when I was about 12 or 13. I had plaits and wore a long, seersucker pinafore that I thought looked quite good," she recalls with a laugh.

"The song was '*Take Me Home, Country Roads*' and it must have been okay, because the women didn't complain."



In the zone: Lyn Eales performing on stage with drummer Jon Emery. Image supplied.

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] L
[/dropcap]yn hasn't stopped singing since and even though she hasn't had a single lesson, her voice has found its own way from the peppy John Denver to the silky, sultry blues of Billie Holiday and beyond.

As Lyn describes it, there is singing that people *hear*, and then there is singing that people *feel*.

"As a singer, you are telling a story and you want people to not only hear that story, but to really *feel* it, to connect with you and the music and the words," she explains, her fingers splayed as if grasping for the right words.

"Summertime, and the livin' is easy...Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high..."

You only need to hear Lyn sing the opening line of this Ella Fitzgerald classic to know she is a *feeler*. By the end of the

song, you are broken hearted and elevated all at once. That's how it works.



Flashback: Lyn, far right, sharing the stage with Wendy Goyen and John Hudson at the Royal Hotel, Warrnambool, in 1999. The Royal was one of many local pubs that once hosted live music. Image supplied.

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[/dropcap]yn is now part of Warrnambool's musical royalty: she has been around long enough to know everybody, to have played in bands with great local musicians who are still making great music – John Hudson, Richard Tankard, Barry Galbraith, Wendy Goyen, Gavin Franklin, Lee Morgan...the list goes on – and to inspire others to find their voices, figuratively and literally.

In the past that has involved teaching young people how to develop their music, from start to finish, through an Australian Music course offered at TAFE. This later incorporated a Koori music course – *Songlines* – with Richard Franklin and Wal Saunders, and gave Lyn an entree into the rich, local indigenous community which she still cherishes.

She also leads the Red Tent Singers, a local women's choir that welcomes all women regardless of experience or age, where

she signed up “to do six weeks”. That was 16 years ago, give or take a few breaks.

“Red Tents is about singing, but it is also so much more than that,” Lyn says.

“It is an incredibly nurturing, caring, grounding environment. To see women arrive with low self confidence and watch them blossom through this slightly whacky group is wonderful.”

Lyn works in a similar vein in her “day job” as a project coordinator with Brophy Family and Youth Services, where, in particular, her work to empower young LGBTI people has been transformative.



Lyn is choir leader for the Red Tent Singers, a women's choir that formed in Warrnambool 16 years ago and has since encouraged dozens of women to find their voice. Here they are performing at St Brigid's Fifteen Minutes of Fame. Image supplied.

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[/dropcap] am starting to see a thread here.

When it comes to standing up for the marginalised or minorities – women, LGBTI, kooris, refugees, asylum seekers – Lyn is the sort of person who will march, who will turn up to protests, who isn't afraid to stand at the front in full voice.

It is a strong sense of social justice that began in her parents' pub and has shaped her ever since.

"I can get tingles 10 times a day from doing the various things that I do, and that is my gauge.

"That tells me I am on the right track."



Lyn chilling out with the sunflowers that form part of her "very random but enjoyable" garden.

[box]Lyn is leading a vocal workshop by the Red Tent Singers at St Brigid's Crossley on Sunday April 30 from 10.30am to 1pm. All welcome and no experience necessary. Cost is \$15/\$10 and includes catering. Call 0407 917 774 for bookings and more details. [Find the event on Facebook here](#). Lyn also performs regularly at the Warrnambool Hotel: keep an eye out for dates

and times.[/box]