

The Black Chooks

Zig Zag Community Arts Inc.

2013



What happens when a large flock of Black Chooks take to the stage repeatedly? The evidence is all in.



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Zig Zag

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Some Statistics

During 2013 there were 45 sessions including the Christmas party at Brockmans’ in Gooseberry Hill. CDs were produced for 41 Sessions plus 3 performances (**Fairbridge, Hilton** and **Kanyana**) plus four pre-performance compilations and one DVD of the **Fairbridge Clubhouse** performance.

During the year we played at least 477 tunes (including repeats and sets but not counting Tunes played repeatedly within a session). The cumulative total number of tunes played (including repeats) in sessions since starting in 2008 now exceeds 2,375. And since 2008 the best simple count of the number of discrete tunes (including sets of tunes) has passed 750.

Place	Top 15 Tunes in 2013 (by frequency played)	Count of Sessions
1	Alberada & Muiniera (set)	16
2	Memories of Scotland & Dissertation Polska (Set)	14
3	Klezmer Set – Flatbush, Sydney’s, Kishiniever, Leberdisch	13
3	Above and beyond Mouse in the Mug & Roaring Barmaid (Set)	13
3	Milo mou kokkino 7/8 [D] trad. Macedonian	13
3	Spoostiskerry, Willa fjord & Sleep Soond I’ the Moarnin (Set)	13
7	Granton Fish Bowl 4/4 (G) Simon Thoumire, arr. A. Cutting	10
8	Adio Kerida (Adio Querida) 2/4 [Em] Ladino song (trad.)	9
8	The History Man [G] 2/4 (Andy Cutting)	9
8	Paddy’s Leather Breeches, Jig of Slurs & Athol Highlanders (Set)	9
8	Moll in the Wood (Em) RSB & Greensleeves (Set)	5
12	Pretty little dog Cluck old hen, & Kitchen girl, (Set)	8
12	Dancing Bear 4/4 [E min] McQuillan	8
14	Dan Murphy, Tom Barratt’s, Tarman’s Cross & Upper Church number 2 (Set)	6
14	Over the moor to Maggie, Farewell to Ireland & High Reel (Set)	5

2013 was a BIG YEAR for Black Chooks

First, We were accepted for Fairbridge Folkworld Festival

Planning started at once, and we resumed on 9 January (not at the end of school holidays). Who can come? What can we play? Where do we sit or stand? Can we do away with music stands?

There was a period of uncertainty about: Which of the proposals had been accepted? How many tickets we had? And how do we pay for extra days? And could we book accommodation?

This was the stuff of real excitement!

Romancing the Stone 3 Lillian Road Maida Vale 10 February

We were invited to play in support of the **All We Need is Right Here** open day for Maida Vale residents. A reasonable selection of chooks played in sweltering heat under some shady trees.



Norma's new Banner got an outing and was challenged by the stiff Easterly.

A selection of quieter tunes and favourites mixed with some of last year's festival stuff was quite well accepted. The crowd was sparse, and as they were meandering through the garden we could not be sure they could even hear us.

Photos: Mike Cheffins



We watched as the belly dancers (in bare feet) realised they needed carpets underfoot as the area they were allocated was in direct sunshine and blisteringly hot, and we didn't feel so stressed after that!



In the garden were several small funky sculptures and this one of a tin fiddler caught someone's attention.

Bush Dance on 06 April with Numguts and Pioneers

Practise for playing the bush dance tunes actually started at the end of February, with a quick romp through *the Claisebrooke Tunnel* set followed



a week later with various sets of reels at breakneck speed!

The Bush Dance had attracted about 100 adults, and probably a bit more than half as many kids.

At the beginning of the evening there

were a few dances where members of the Band supplemented the dancers to make the numbers right. By the time it was dark everyone was joining in and having a good time.



Photos: Mike Cheffins



The chooks added considerable volume to the Numguts sound, and we played some of the Chooks familiar pieces.

This was the first outing for the colourful music stand covers.

The Pioneers David & Liz Rivett had the twilight stint

Kalamunda Agricultural Show 20 April

We played some of the tunes we had planned for Fairbridge. Sort of a dress rehearsal, in a tent...



This year we followed after *the Hills Pipe Band*, which gave more of the crowd a chance to arrive and they were appreciative of the noise we made. *Barbara* played with both bands, which was pretty impressive:



Flute with *the Chooks* after Drumming with *the Pipers!*

Left: Chook's eye view on stage

Below: Chooks with chooks (see crowd behind).



Fairbridge Festival Performance 28 April

The booking was for a Saturday morning performance in the *Clubhouse*. It's a comparatively intimate venue with a 10 foot ceiling, a big stone fireplace behind the stage, and heavy wooden folding doors framing the stage.



Photo Steve Bunn

We almost all arrived quite early and set up our own instruments and then spent the rest of the time fidgeting. Initially, sound pickup was not as we had planned, it looked like we would be unamplified. But band member placement was close to what had been discussed and we could hear each other quite well.

At the last minute *Soul*, the sound guy, put out a set of microphones across the front of the stage and the sound was reportedly quite good.



The MC introduced us, quite casually, and we set off at a brisk pace. It was as if someone had released us as a roller coaster ride – we accelerated away, and there was no time to ask how fast this should go and certainly no chance to go back and pick up any dropped notes!

The audience had filled the hall to capacity, there were people standing at the back. Tune followed tune (albeit not quite in the order planned) the sets went together well. *Chooks* singing accompanied by *chooks* playing eggs! Then Swanee whistles and whizzers interjecting in *the Klezmer* set were splendid.





The applause was loud and enthusiastic, we did need an encore, and then it was all over. Families came and hugged players, friends slapped backs and shook hands, and then suddenly, there was no trace that we had been on the stage.

The Chooks had acquitted themselves to an audience of their peers and it had all gone off rather well.

Off to get a proper coffee! But carrying instruments around was a hassle, so most of us booked them into the safe storage; then we could wander around looking at other acts, and occasionally bump into other Chooks ranging freely.

There was some rain, and for a time it was quite heavy. But spirits were not dampened. As the allotted time came around for Busking outside the chapel the muster was more ragged than the morning.



Playing in the open air has its risks, and we discovered we were spread out too wide, and the ends couldn't hear each other. *Norma* was in the middle and had to decide which part to follow? The early players on her left, or the later players on her right...

Video Stills :Michael Cheffins

Too many of us to fit in Heavenly Toad Cottage?

May saw us try Town Square Community Hall.

It turns out it is an echo chamber! Makes it difficult to play anything staccato like a mandododolinlinlin.



Collaborations with two choirs on Election Night, and a week later

A Kappella Munda has successfully performed in “cabaret mode” in conjunction with another choir, putting on a mixture of full choir tunes, with small sub-groups doing comedy songs and parodies. The last few times their collaborators were *the Real Sing* – an auditioned community choir with a contemporary repertoire.

This time the collaborators were Fremantle’s **Voicemale** – and **the Black Chooks**. But hang on, we aren’t a choir, we don’t play tunes with lyrics, do we?



Lesmurdie Community Hall: *The Black Chooks* on stage, *Voicemale* on the left with *A Kappella Munda* on the right



Up Hill and Down Dale were two performances in community halls in Lesmurdie and Hilton. *A Kappella Munda* opened the concert, followed by *Voicemale*, then *the Diamantes* (six sexy sopranos) with *The Black Chooks* on last (helped by the two choirs for our opening & closing numbers).

Not only were the crowd appreciative, the Choirs enjoyed the collaboration and want to do more with *the Chooks*, and the organiser of *the Dunsborough SongFest* invited *the Chooks* to attend their 2014 festival.



Hilton Community Hall: *The Black Chooks* on stage, *Voicemale* on the left with *A Kappella Munda* on the right



Video Stills : Michael Cheffins

Walk the Zig Zag at the beginning of October

The Walk happens every year on the path of the old railway track up the escarpment to Gooseberry Hill. The corners (originally the shunting yards where the trains would change direction) have a mix of community groups and entertainers set up in 3m by 3m pop-up marquees. *The Zig Zag Festival* uses this opportunity to remind the thousands of locals that the Festival is on the other end of October. For the last 2 years *the Zig Zag Festival* and *the Black Chooks* have been located on Bend 3.



Setting up the marquees started at 6am; Festival promotion on one side, and a double marquee for *the Chooks* on the other side. All vehicles must be out by 8, so drove back to *Heavenly Toad Cottage* and then dashed down Headingly Road to catch the Community Bus with all the musicians at 8:15 to get dropped off at bend 3 at about 8:40.

The walkers started down the hill at 9am (*the Hills Pipe Band* normally takes the high ground at the start). For the musicians, this was a long day. *The Chooks* started to play at about 9:15 and it wasn't

until *the Junkadelic Street Band* marched by that we took a real break.



Don't get me wrong, there was no slave driver beating us on, we just sort of got-in-the-groove and played, and played...



We played a mix of favourites, performance tunes, and bush dance numbers. When we reflect back on the number of tunes we played that day, yes, some we played several times, but that was a lot of music!



Seemed like smaller crowds than last year, in spite of the better weather. Sometimes appreciative - staying to watch us play a whole number or two sometimes enough to give us applause. Small children and Nanans were caught dancing spontaneously.

Video Stills : Michael Cheffins

Zig Zag Festival at the end of October

The Zig Zag Festival has been the performance fundamental for the Chooks. Returning to *the Rotary Checkerboard Stage* presented us with several challenges, when we first performed on that stage in 2008 there were only eight of us! This year we were going to be seventeen! and Dave Rivett stepped away from the sound control desk and joined us for a couple of numbers making us eighteen.

Photos: Gillian Berry Dragancaor Creative



And then they Danced!



Holy Family Church Fete Saturday 2 November

Black Chooks with White Elephant!

A warm Saturday morning under cover outside the church hall, off Railway Road Kalamunda. Mark and Beck arrived in the Austin Healy, which always attracts a few admirers.

Video Still: Michael Cheffins



We sat in a comfortable circle, and played a succession of favourites in a gentler mix of tunes selected by *Jill*, with a few of the performance numbers thrown in for contrast. We played two sets of about an hour each, with a break for tea and scones and a little shopping in between.

This was a very relaxed and comfortable gig, with some numbers played particularly well.

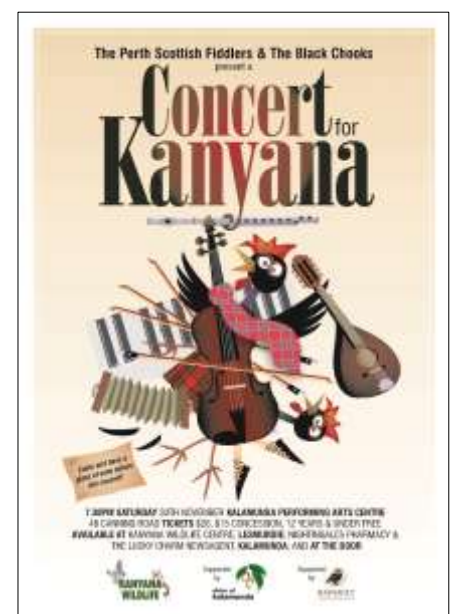
‘Concert for Kanyana’ with the Perth Scottish Fiddlers 30 November

It was **Alan Malcolm** suggested it, and organised it, and licensed it, and managed it, and we all carried it all off brilliantly!

Looking back, we had played more often outside than inside, and even when inside it wasn’t exactly a concert space. So this would be different: indoors in **the Kalamunda Performing Arts Centre** with a stage with audience seated in a raked auditorium.

In collaboration with **the Perth Scottish Fiddlers** there was an expectation we would play some tunes together. *Alan* was also playing in **the Fiddlers**, so he got to suggest the tunes, some of which we had under (most of) our belts. The Shetlands reels: *Spot O’ Skerry*, *Willfjord reel* and *Sleep soond I’ tha moarnin*.

To that was added a contrasting set of Jigs: *the Jig of Slurs* (which we had played several years ago) *The Athol Highlanders* (ditto, less times though) and a new one: *Paddy’s Leather Breeches*. *Alan* tried teaching us *Paddy*



phrase-by-phrase (so we didn't need written music).

We gradually worked the sets up to speed, and started to wonder how the Fiddlers would contribute. If we arrange the parts just so, will they follow that? So then we arranged a joint rehearsal and the venue chosen was where *Jackadder's Folk Club* meets. That was an interesting session, even with only two sets to play we went over them many times each, and changed some of the arrangements. (video stills below)



One more practise in the Cottage and then the night of the concert came around, and we did our sound check on stage. As performance time got closer the excitement grew. We were sold out! The crowd was big!

The Fiddlers went first, the sound was good and clear. Ken Kenny was MC and started each group with some apposite poetry.



They played all together and then some of them played parts and then as a quartet and back together again. There was an intermission to build the suspense further. Then it was our turn, we had 39 minutes of music and 45 minutes to introduce and play it.

We were fast. Probably it was the fastest we have ever played some of those tunes. We didn't crash and burn, we just flew! (Chooks can fly, who would have guessed?).



Photos: John Bombardieri

Then *the Fiddlers* joined us on stage, and we stretched all the way from one side of the stage to the other, and most way from the front edge to the back wall. We all went for it! And it worked.



The applause was huge. We thanked *Alan* because he deserved it, and because we had had a good time. And we had to do an encore? What about *the Athol Highlanders* again? And the entire audience clapped along with us. If we had more planned they would have lapped it up.

After a joyfully brief clear up, a few of us said “let’s go to the pub to celebrate, what about ***the Best Drop?*** There’s a session on Saturdays”. And so it was that a few chooks invaded *the Drop’s* session and were it not for the lack of food at that time of night more would have joined us and stayed later.

New Year’s Eve Bush Dance with Numguts and the Pioneers

Not many weeks to practise, what with Christmas in the way, but a truly great concept for a fun fundraiser family outing.

It was an exclusively local promotion. There was the Banner on Stirk Park / Kalamunda Road roundabout, notices in some Primary Schools end of term newsletters, about 100 posters around Kalamunda, Lesmurdie and Gooseberry Hill. A mention at ***the Carols By Candle-light concert*** in Stirk Park (repeated on ***KCR FM*** on Christmas Day); a big poster outside ***Collodel’s Ice Creamery*** and ***Mike and John Matthews***, ZZCA Chairman, Spruiked the ***Saturday Rotary Markets*** 6 December and the ***Sunday Farmers’ Markets*** 29 December distributing over 2000 tiny flyers.

It was the only family activity in the area and drew in a record crowd of watchers and dancers. Probably 300 adults plus more than that number of children. There were several lines of dancers for the traditional dances, and the big circles were huge!



What about the *Count-Down to Midnight*? Here was the twist: *David Hoffman* had suggested we do the count-down **at 8pm** and pick somewhere like NZ or Fiji. It turns out they both have daylight saving, so we chose **Tuvalu**. Where's that you ask? Right on the Equator, and 4 hours earlier than Perth. Hills Pipe Band Piper, Tom, came and piped Auld Lang Syne for us.



Photos: Gillian Berry Dragancaor Creative



Tom the Piper



Music

The other non-addictive,
non-substance

Ask your doctor if Music is right
for you.

Common side-effects include, but are
not limited to: Uncontrolled head-
bobbing, Toe-tapping & Finger snapping,
Spontaneous grinning, may induce
Earworms.

Upcycle Photo: Katrina Bercov