

String Ensemble

Isobel Geeves

In 1947 a group of young people living in Taroom decided they would like to go further into the making of music than just playing "solo". The young James girls and boys, namely, Carlyle, Miriam, June and their cousin Ken, drew in other family members and friends: Reg Escott, Bob Imms and Shirley Imms. This meant they now had five violinists and one cellist, with two violinists able to play piano and viola when necessary. This was the beginning of the Taroom String Ensemble. After two years of playing together happily, they invited three young girls to join them, extending the string section. The girls were Joan Bloomer, Wendy Fooks and June Brimage.

In early 1950 the Ensemble began to break up, due to school commitments or marriage, which took some members out of the area. In this period Isobel Geeves joined as pianist, and Meg Geeves and Wesley James as violinists. In the late 1950s Carlyle James returned to Taroom and the Ensemble. Also drawn in were Myles Sykes - violinist, and John Millington - cellist. With Joan Humble (nee Bloomer) as the leader and the string section now much stronger, the "hard ones" were tackled! Music by Arne, Corelli, Vivaldi, Purcell, Handell, Bach, Pleyel, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven were played in various ways, eg. a small orchestra, string quartet or trio, wind-string chamber group, piano chamber group or duet.

On occasions the Ensemble was very fortunate in having Ted Evans and Wilfred Jones of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and also Gwynn Williams come down and play with them. These visitors gave the Ensemble very welcome advice on "how to do it", but almost exclusively it operated as a Chamber Group with no conductor. Early in 1960 a Junior Ensemble was formed with Robyn Geeves - pianist, and Nancy James, Roslyn and Peter Harris - strings.

Many visiting and short term members have joined in to play and some wonderful evenings were had. These members were:

Tony Morgan - cellist, Don Triffit, Peter Harris, Paul Fenton, Julian Robinson, Mark Legg, Barbara Chandler, June Scott - violinists.

The Ensemble consisted of:

Joan Humble (nee Bloomer) - leader, violin, Wendy Ayling (nee Fooks) - violin, Miles Sykes - violin, Carlyle James - violin and viola, Ken James - cello, John Millington - cello.

This was increased by the addition of new members:

Dave Sugden - violin, Vic Threader - clarinet, David Cook - flute, Solomon Beer - violin, Gwynn Williams - violin, Anne Muller - cello, Elizabeth Allen - violin.

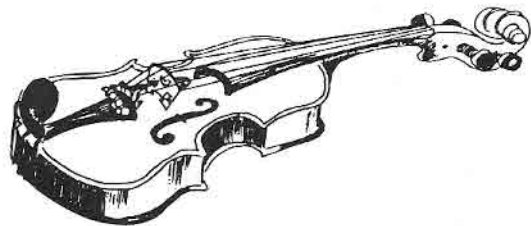
Since it began in 1947 the Ensemble has, with rare exceptions, met regularly each week in the home of one of its members. Between 8.00p.m. and 10.00 p.m. the meetings consisted of a solid practice session. After that it was supper and a talk until about 11.00 p.m.

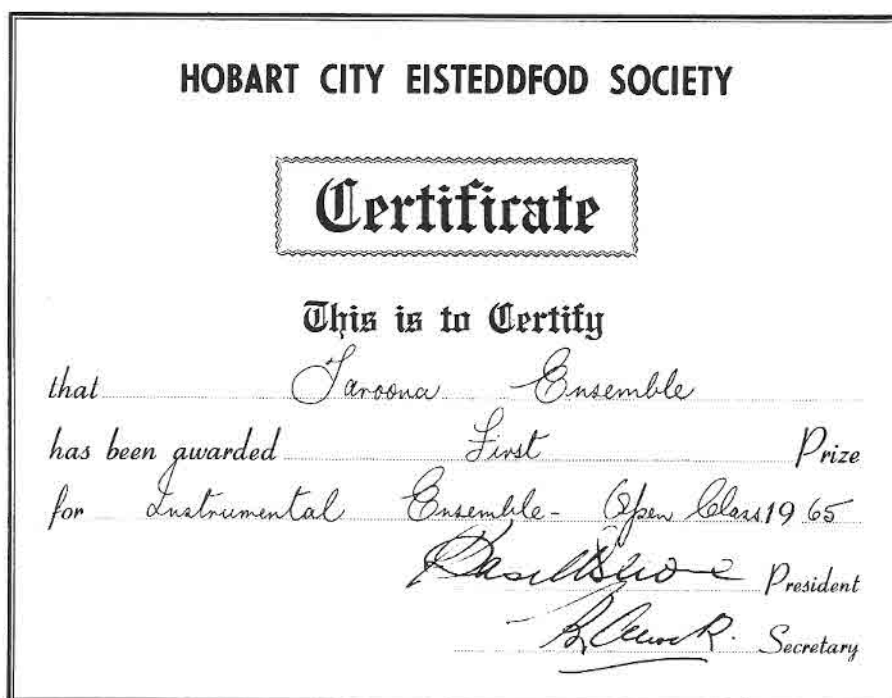
Between 1960 and 1974 the Ensemble took part in the Hobart and Eastern Shore Eisteddfords, gaining many first and second prizes. Once or twice it participated as the only entrant to keep the Chamber Music Section open. Much pleasure was had playing at homes for the Aged, Church functions, Taroom Theatre Guild functions, school concerts and the Riverside Arts Club. One Christmas the Ensemble played Carols in the Taroom Shopping Centre.

Since 1980, although somewhat reduced, meetings are still held regularly each week, even if only for a trio or duet. The Ensemble now consists of:

Isobel Geeves - piano, Wendy Robinson (Ayling) - violin, Dave Sugden - violin, Carlyle James - violin and viola, Ken James - cello. New additions are: Sally James - violin, Geoffrey James - piano.

As long as possible the Ensemble will continue to meet and make music together, for that is what it was all about.





One of many certificates won by the Taroona String Ensemble. ISOBEL GEEVES.



The String Ensemble c1953.

L to R: Mark Legg, Meg Geeves, Wesley James, Carlyle James, Ken James, Robyn Geeves,
Isobel Geeves. Front: Joan Bloomer.

PHOTO ISOBEL GEEVES.

Theatre Guild

Amy Acton

After adjudicating at the Country Women's Association's Drama Festival, Mr Frank Clewlow, retired director of the Stratford-on-Avon Theatre in England, suggested the formation of a Theatre Group in Taroona. This led to twenty people meeting in the Old Public Hall one evening in March 1953, and forming a group which, on Peddy McKay's suggestion, became known as the Taroona Theatre Guild. Vin McKay was elected president, Thora Stephens, secretary and Amy Acton, treasurer. The membership increased steadily, mainly due to Vi Smith canvassing the district for prospective members.

The assistance of the Adult Education Board was sought and Mr John Tydde, drama tutor, was selected to supervise the production of three one-act plays. Within four months of the Guild's formation these plays were presented to an invited audience of fifty people.

It was at this time that the guild learnt how necessary it was to pay in advance royalties on all productions. During the following week an agent of the French Publishing Co. called on the Treasurer.

It was only by convincing him no one had paid for admission that the Guild was not charged 15 shillings royalty for each one-act play presented.

Heartened by the success of the first effort it became our ambition to present a three-act play.

Under John Tydde's supervision a three-act comedy, *Winter Sunshine*, was played for two nights to capacity houses.

Membership continued to grow and Guild nights were arranged for the third Saturday of each month, when one-act plays, sketches, mimes and guest artists were presented.

The next three-act play was produced by Frank Clewlow and reviewed in the *Mercury* by "Thespian" under the two column heading:

Big Success for Theatre Guild

The Taroona Theatre Guild's Production of J.B. Priestley's "They Came to a City"

The second, since its formation 12 months ago would have done credit to a regular city company. . . the stage must surely be the smallest in Tasmania. It had been considered impossible to have nine people on the stage at once, but

Vin McKay and his assistants' excellently made sets created an illusion of space that added greatly to the quality of the play.

During the following years many fine one and three-act plays were produced. The one-act plays were presented at Guild nights, variety concerts and as exchange productions with many of the amateur groups active in Hobart. For nearly ten years plays were entered in the Hobart Drama Festival.

From the beginning of the Guild's activities help and instruction were given by Adult Education tutors, John Tydde, Frank Clewlow, John Baldwin and Bob Cabbage, all of whom supervised the production of three-act plays.

Eventually the Guild reached a standard when the Board considered its members sufficiently proficient to carry on unaided. This high standard had not been achieved without the dedication of producers, casts and back stage workers.

Three-act plays were presented as far afield as Geeveston, Ouse and Maydena. The most southerly venue was at Alonnah, South Bruny Island, where a large audience gathered in the local hall for the presentation of the mystery thriller *The Paper Chain*. The organisers showed their appreciation by entertaining the cast and stage hands to an excellent dinner. The Guild members had left Taroona before six o'clock and travelled by car, ferry and along rough roads to reach their destination. To enable the company to return home that night the organisers engaged a special ferry to sail from the island to the mainland. To visit these towns would have been impossible without the assistance of Max Gould who always made his services and his truck available to transport sets and properties to venues.

Unfortunately, with the exception of the last one (1963-1970), all minute books have been lost. However I recall that Betty James, Thora Stephens, Eileen-Mary Robinson, Diarmid Menzies, Vin McKay and Harold Acton were members who produced the Guild's plays. Guest producers were Ida Drabble, Deidre McIndoe and George Thomas.

The back stage hands were specialists in their fields. The lighting, sets and effects were remarkable. Difficult properties were always obtained and on one occasion the *Mercury* drama critic wrote in his review of Betty

Clubs and Organisations

James' production of the mystery comedy *How Now Hecate*:

The back-stage staff have their hands full dealing with rolling thunder, flashing lighting, boiling cauldrons and all that is associated with black magic.

It cannot be stated how many members belonged to the Guild, but the number would be over a hundred. Members ranged in age from teenager, Tony Wilson to our patron, Mrs Phyllis Benjamin, M.L.C., a local resident and an active member. In latter years several members came from other suburbs.

The Guild functioned successfully until the early sixties. By then transport to Hobart had improved and the introduction of television caused audience and membership numbers to fall. This caused great concern and in the eleventh annual report in 1963 President Harold Acton stated the membership had reached an all time low of twenty five. Despite this, during the following year Betty James produced a successful three-act play, *The Breath of Spring*.

Three Guild nights were held, one with the Ridgeway Concert Party as guest artists. The others consisted of sketches, mimes and, with characters in full dress, readings of the one-act plays *Out of Their Class* and *In Your Cup*, with the Country Women's Association's Choral Group and Tarooma Musical Ensemble as guest artists.

Due to casting difficulties a play had not been entered in the 1963 Hobart Drama Festival, the first omission for many years.

In 1964 the Kingborough Commission decreed that the Old Public Hall was only fit for demolition as the power was cut off and the Health Department would not renew the licence under any condition. Notwithstanding these setbacks, under Len Bell's leadership the enthusiastic members endeavoured to carry on.

The Ex-Servicemen's Association Hall was used for Guild nights. Play readings were held in the hope of finding a suitable entry for the Festival. *But Once a Year*, a three-act play was put into production. Unfortunately, due to difficulties with rehearsals and finding a suitable venue for staging the production, the play had to be withdrawn.

A diligent but unsuccessful search was made to find a suitable hall nearer the city to suit the requirements for amalgamation with the Stratford Players. In these dire circumstances the Anglesea Players invited any of our actors, who wished to do so, to join their group.

At the Annual Meeting in August 1965 a motion was moved and passed suspending the constitution *pro tempore*. As there were hopes that an assembly hall would be built when the Tarooma State High School was constructed, and there were indications the hall would be available for the Guild's use, a Holding Committee was elected. This committee held office until 1970, when it was disbanded and the soft wardrobe donated to the Country Women's Association Drama Group. Copies of plays were given to the State Library and the remaining finances, \$64, donated to the Lord Mayor's Peruvian Relief Fund.



Members of Tarooma Theatre Guild's production of "*Indoor Fireworks*", produced by John Baldwin.

L to R: Vee Brown, Len Bell, Adele Olsen, Bob Brownlie, Betty James, Derek Haigh, Marianne Gowland, Charles Viney, Val Bell, Isobel Geeves.

PHOTO "THE MERCURY".