

Notes for the Future

Submission Overview

“If education is about anything, it’s surely about introducing young people to something new, unfamiliar and inspiring – not always an easy task.”

James Harper, Music Critic, *The Courier Mail*

Around 400 students participate in Ferny Grove High’s Instrumental Music program.

The program is not a hothouse for musically “gifted and talented” students alone, but is open to all. Many instrumental music students are among the school’s highest academic achievers, but the program is also home to a significant number of students who would feel no strong commitment to stay at school were it not for the program.

Parents, past students, community groups and arts organisations are extensively involved, and the program is one of Queensland’s most highly regarded, an enrolment drawcard for the school, and a major influence on students’ attitudes to learning and community participation.

The Instrumental Music staff room is the hub where students, staff and parents come together to work, share information, food or chat. Lively interaction between staff, students and parents is the key to the program’s character and culture.

Description

Ferny Grove High’s Instrumental Music program involves around 400 students in 20 ensembles, including an orchestra, six percussion ensembles, two guitar ensembles and a 260-voice choir, which includes a 60-voice boys’ choir.

The process that has led to the current situation began in about 2001. At that time the program was solid but unremarkable, being based, like so many others, on concert bands, competitions, and occasional school concerts and shopping-centre gigs.

Parent involvement was limited to fundraising and there were no substantial links with the wider community. The repertoire was narrow, and largely restricted to works suitable for competitions, or even prescribed by competition organisers.

Like many such programs, it was quite attractive to the academically gifted, and to highly motivated students with an interest in classical music. It provided little opportunity for those who had not been involved in music since primary school, and those, particularly boys, who had trouble engaging in school life.

Like most Instrumental Music teachers, the program’s staff worked in several programs in several schools until, in 2001, Ferny Grove High decided to supplement the time provided by Education Queensland and buy extra time for two staff to become full time.

That innovation had a significant influence on what happened next.

The teachers were now able to participate more fully in school life. They were able to forge stronger relationships with students, other staff and parents, to think more creatively, to take risks and become part of a community – things that are quite difficult to do when you are constantly coming and going.

In order to involve the whole community in a way that hadn’t been tried at Ferny Grove before, the program decided to attempt a series of major works that would challenge everybody, but that anyone could be involved in.

An early milestone was the performance of *Canto General*, by Greek composer, Mikis Theodorakis. *Canto*, a 30-minute piece in Spanish and Greek, challenged many expectations of what a school might attempt. Students, staff and parents were invited to participate - the only requirement was regular attendance at rehearsals.

The project caught the attention of other organisations and, at the end of 2001, Ferny Grove was asked to be involved in a partnership with Oxfam Community Aid Abroad and Brisbane City Council in a project called *Stand With Us*, billed as “a gesture of support for young refugees”. The choir joined professional musicians, community choirs and refugee students from Milpera High to perform *Canto* at Brisbane’s Powerhouse Theatre.

Stand With Us led to an invitation to perform in the 2003 Queensland Music Festival. The concert, entitled *Alafiah ... Freedom*, culminated a six-month project involving professional musicians, refugee students, and instrumentalists and vocalists from Ferny Grove.

In 2003 the school also presented Melbourne composer Irine Vela’s music-theatre work, *Little City*. Teachers and parents participated in the production, a work in three languages dealing in political ideas - far from a typical school musical.

Canto, *Alafiah* and *Little City* were hugely successful, artistically and socially. They gave students the experience of creating something together, and a taste of music’s power to express the human condition. They highlight the three principles that have been central to the program’s evolution:

- Diversifying repertoire
- Broadening participation
- Building relationships

Diversifying Repertoire

An emphasis on non-standard repertoire aimed to extend students’ horizons beyond the limitations imposed by a focus on competitions, and beyond the pop culture that dominates so much of their lives.

Broadening Participation

Staff decided to change the program’s emphasis, to opt out of competitions and broaden the student base, so that every student in the school could, potentially, take part.

Instrumental music requires discipline, coordination and higher-order thinking so, traditionally, instrumental music students tended to be high academic achievers with good parent support. But music is also very physical, requiring a high level of energy – characteristics that can make it particularly attractive to teenaged boys.

The experience with *Canto* and *Alafiah* convinced us that a large, non-auditioned choir where everyone was welcome would be an essential centrepiece for a truly accessible program. It would provide the best opportunity for students of all levels of ability to become involved in music making and to experience the joy of creating something together.

Most state secondary schools struggle to maintain choral programs. Primary schools are very active in this area but participation tends not to carry on to high school – most boys, in particular, don’t want to be seen in a choir.

Relationship building was central to persuading students to take part and to try new things. That meant creating an environment in which they felt secure and could take risks in expressing themselves.

Building Relationships

The shared experiences of performance, and of being part of a vibrant department, were essential in creating the necessary level of trust and enjoyment. Central to cultivating the appropriate atmosphere was an “open-door” staffroom policy that made students and parents welcome, helping create camaraderie and an inclusive culture.

As a result, students habitually show respect for staff, property and each other. Many students spend all their spare time at school in the instrumental music department, playing music, dancing, eating, socialising, helping set up, doing homework – it has become a haven for all sorts of students, some of whom are not even directly involved in the program.

As in most cultures, sharing food is an important bonding agent - and for teenagers, especially boys, food plays an important role in concentration. The department bought a cold water bubbler and a sandwich maker, which is kept regularly supplied by parental donations of bread, cheese and peanut butter. A further result has been a steep decline in the consumption of “red foods” by instrumental music students.

The student-staff relationship is characteristically informal. The closeness of this relationship is reflected in the characteristic energy of the department's performances, the nonverbal interactions, and the absolute joy that the students clearly experience (see DVD footage).

Other innovations

SLAB

The establishment of SLAB (Sound, Lighting and Backstage), the program's technical crew, provided opportunities in the program for students with technical rather than musical skills.

Head of Department

In 2005, the school acknowledged the rapidly growing importance of the Instrumental Music program by introducing a workplace reform to appoint a Head of Department, Instrumental Music. Full-time leadership has enabled the program to reach even greater levels of artistic achievement. This is the first appointment of a Head of Instrumental Music in Education Queensland.

Connections to QSE – 2010 and/or Education and Training Reforms for the Future

Learning to live with complexity, uncertainty and diversity

We live in a society where the character of family and community life is changing at such a rate that it is difficult for young people to feel a sense of belonging, or that they are part of a community and have something to offer that is valued.

Large schools like Ferny Grove can provide many opportunities, but it's also easy to feel lost in the crowd. The Instrumental Music program offers more than musical instruction, it provides social support for a large percentage of the student body. Certainly, its performance opportunities enable students to experience the power of music, an experience that both generates enthusiasm and stimulates their creative imagination.

But these outcomes are strengthened by their taking place in an environment where students have a sense of belonging. This environment is happy and inclusive due to several mutually reinforcing strands:

- The mostly informal, collegial relationship between students and staff
- Close involvement from parents and families
- The "open door" staffroom policy
- Easy mixing of age groups in ensembles and general social interaction

Such an environment enables a level of achievement far higher than might be expected from the general skill base – few of the students belong in the musically gifted and talented category, and only a minority have developed extensive skills through private musical tuition.

Improving School Retention Rates

The Instrumental Music program has been a major contributor to Ferny Grove's retention rates. While it is well known that there is a strong correlation between academic achievement and participation in music, Instrumental Music attracts not only academic, motivated students, but also students at risk of being marginalized, through finding little to engage them at school.

The program gives many students who could otherwise be alienated from the school environment a reason to engage in the life of the school.

Boys' Education

The kind of practical learning that occurs in the Instrumental Music program is ideal for the way that many boys learn. It encompasses aspects of all perceptual modes of learning - kinaesthetic, tactile, auditory and visual. It allows for a degree of obsessiveness, involves movement and allows them to be expressive, in ways that are not aggressive.

Parents are eager to see their boys involved in the program. Participation provides a positive outlet for their high energy levels, and helps them stay out of trouble. Dancing, drumming and singing sessions are frequent and spontaneous.

The environment encourages students to be tolerant of each other's eccentricities and to be generous in their mutual support, rather than constantly stirring and running each other down in "competitive" fashion. As they find their place in the department's culture, students who may have tendencies towards overtly aggressive or intolerant ways of interacting tend to shed that behaviour. Senior boys figure prominently in the program, acting as role models, and encouraging younger boys to become involved.

Cross-cultural Awareness

Ferny Grove is a fairly mono-cultural area and students have few opportunities to mix and get to know their peers from other cultures. Instrumental music projects like *Stand with Us* and *Alafiah*, which brought Ferny Grove students together with peers from refugee backgrounds, enabled them to collaborate with students from many cultures and gain some understanding of their very different situations. Innovative repertoire choices such as *Little City* and *Canto*, also gave students an insight into other cultures, languages and points of view.

Middle-Phase Links and Transition

Ferny Grove has developed strong links with the local primary schools. Our ensembles perform an annual concert at each of our four feeder primary schools. Gifted and talented primary students are invited to play in high school ensembles. Instrumental music teachers from the Ferny Grove program tutor at the local primary school's annual music camp at no expense to the primary schools.

Community Partnerships

The program has also established successful partnerships with numerous government and community organisations, including the Brisbane City Council, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, Lifeline, the Queensland Orchestra, the Brisbane Festival, the Queensland Festival, the Samford Rotary Club, Brisbane Birralees Voices, and various state government departments. These partnerships have given students opportunities to engage with the wider community and to perform in a variety of situations.

Outcomes

Inclusivity

The base of the program has greatly broadened, to include a large number of students who previously had no opportunity to take part.

- Since 2000, the number of students in the program has doubled, from around 200 to over 400, while the total school population has increased by less than 10%. (See Appendix 1, Figure 1)
- The number of boys in the program has more than doubled. (See Appendix 1, Figure 2)
- In 2000, there was no school choir. In 2007, there are three, the largest consists of over 260 students. (See Appendix 1, Figure 3)
- The number of ensembles in the program grew from seven, in 2000, to 20 in 2007. (See Appendix 1, Figure 4)
- In 2000, the number of students in the program who had not been involved in music at primary school was zero. In 2006, more than 150 were able to take part, despite having had no musical opportunities before high school. (See Appendix 1, Figure 5)

Mobilising Family and Community Support

Parents are frequent visitors to the music staffroom and interact with teachers and students every day. They are encouraged not only to attend concerts but also to get involved in organizing them through our key partnership, the Music Support Committee. The high level of joint involvement by parents and students gives them a stake in the program's success and strengthens the whole school community. Currently the group consists of 30 members and last year fundraised over \$17,000 towards the program.

Parent satisfaction with the program and its effects on their children is extremely high. (See Appendix 2 for a selection of parents' comments.) In 2006, parents continued the tradition established in *Canto* and *Little City* by forming their own choir.

Their first performance, a surprise item at a major school concert, was greeted with rapt enthusiasm and a standing ovation by students, demonstrating that the regular parent involvement in the program has created rapport between the collective student and parent bodies.

Another outcome of the program's relationship building with students is the connections that persist long after they have left the school. Several past students are now involved in conducting and tutoring school ensembles as well as arranging and composing for the program. In 2006, more than 30 past students returned to school to rehearse and perform at the school's annual Gala Concert.

In 2007, former students will join with the parent choir to perform at a school concert. Later in the year past students and parents will join the student body in a massed choir for a special performance.

Since 2001, the program has commissioned four new works for the senior percussion ensemble, by former student John Parker, now an emerging professional composer. Those pieces have been mainstays of the group's repertoire, and have now been published and made available to other schools.

Academic Success

Despite all the changes and innovations, the program still caters to high academic performers. In 2006, 35 of 45 students, including 31 of 33 girls, who received five As or more in one semester, were instrumental music students.

For some academically gifted students, involvement in instrumental music is an important exposure to other ways of learning. Students who struggle academically may have very strong physical or aural skills. Sometimes they learn, memorize and perform difficult music far more quickly and in more musical depth than academic students. Realising this promotes respect among students for other people's abilities and can build confidence in less academically successful students. Each year, several students have gone on to tertiary studies who would have had little or no chance of achieving a university education had they not been involved in music.

Artistic Success and Community Partnerships

Audiences of all kinds, including professional musicians and festival organisers, have responded to the enthusiasm, energy and expressiveness that characterise Ferny Grove ensemble performances. Whereas once performances were restricted to school concerts and competitions, students now perform for local, interstate and national audiences. Ferny Grove groups have appeared at the Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane Convention Centre, and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, to name only a few.

In 2005-06 the school had a successful partnership with the community-based Birralelee Voices young people's choir. The school's senior percussion ensemble featured at Birralelee's tenth anniversary concert, and was invited, along with Birralelee, to perform at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games Cultural Festival in March 2006.

The percussion group frequently performs at community and corporate events, and has appeared at the Premier's Smart Awards, the Brisbane Festival and the Queensland Music Festival. Our percussion program is one of the strongest in Australia.

The instrumental program has other strong local connections, with groups such as the Chamber Strings and Big Band featuring at Samford Rotary's annual Music by the Lake festival, performing at local primary schools and hosting the annual primary school music camp.

The program has also developed strong connections with the wider arts community. Professional musicians, some of them past students, often appear as guest artists at the school's major concerts.

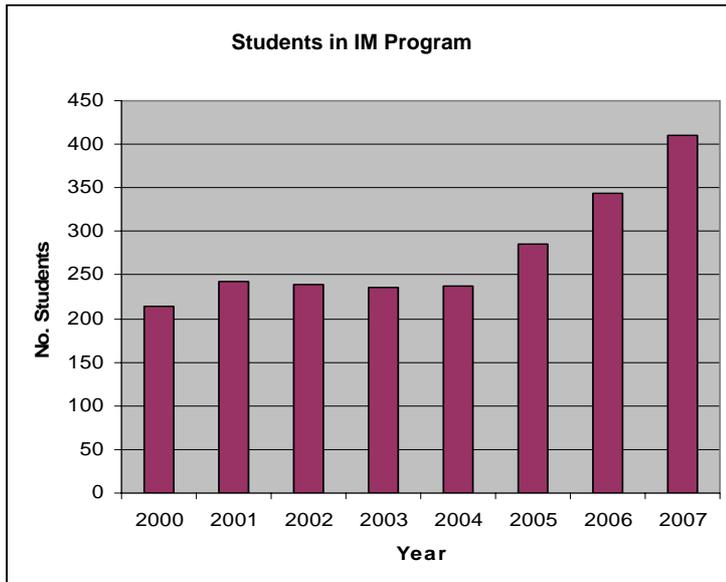
Conclusion

Ferny Grove is a large school that offers a wide variety of experience, yet the first choice of around a quarter of the students is a low-tech, communal activity requiring both a degree of discipline and inconvenience – early mornings, long hours – and requiring overt emotional expression in often unfamiliar idioms. It offers a distinct alternative to the technological, media-focused, rather insular world of the iPod-wearing, text-messaging modern teenager.

The key to the program's success has been its ability to nurture a close relationship between teachers, students, parents and community. It is the trust that comes from that relationship and the resultant sense of belonging that enable students to be prepared to tackle unfamiliar material, to connect with fellow students – many of whom they would not otherwise mix with - and explore artistic experiences unlike those they are used to getting from the popular culture that absorbs so much of their attention.

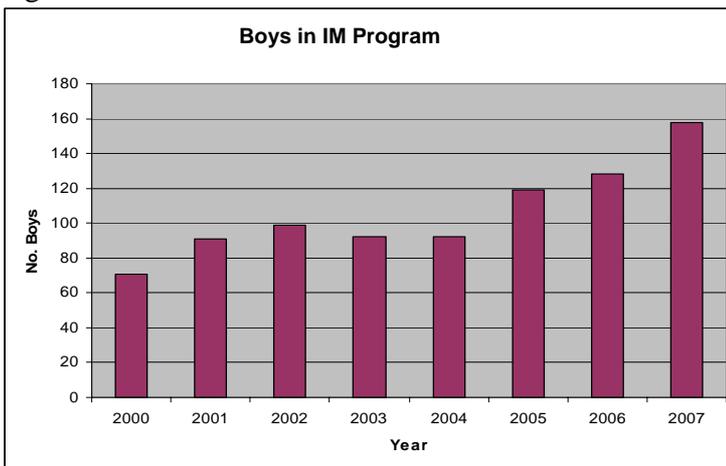
Appendix 1

Figure 1



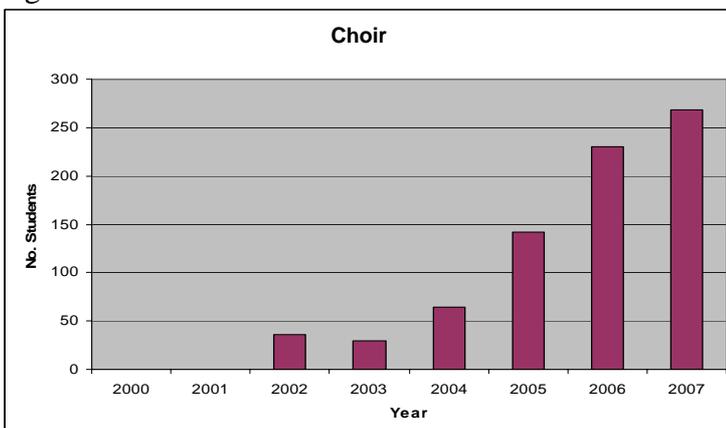
Since 2000, the number of students in the program has doubled, from around 200 to over 400, while the total school population has increased by less than 10%.

Figure 2



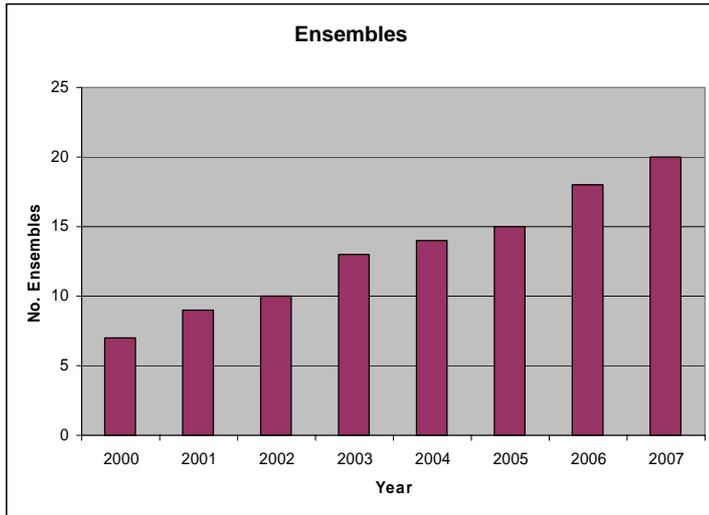
The number of boys in the program has more than doubled.

Figure 3



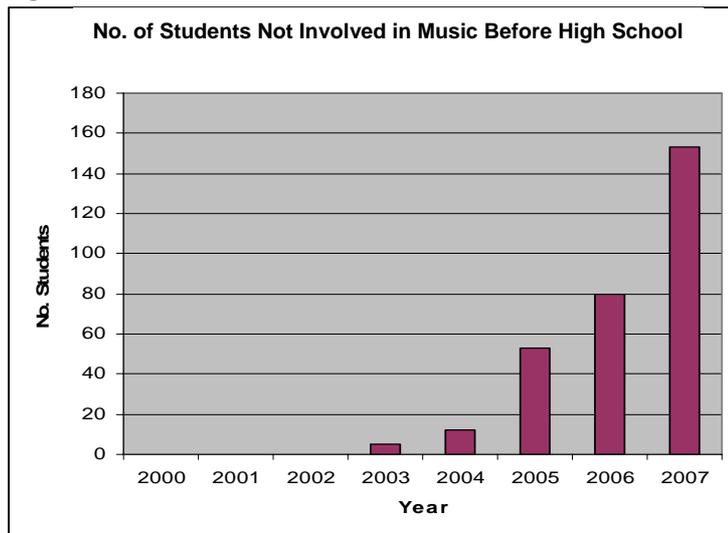
In 2000, there was no school choir. In 2007, there are three, the largest consists of over 260 students.

Figure 4



The number of ensembles in the program grew from seven, in 2000, to 20 in 2007.

Figure 5



In 2000, the number of students in the program who had not been involved in music at primary school was zero. In 2006, more than 150 were able to take part, despite having had no musical opportunities before high school.

Appendix 2

Comments by parents and students

In the past five years that I have been involved in the Music Support Group, the music program has grown. Every child who wants to participate in the programme, is given the opportunity to do so which means that we now have six percussion ensembles, 260+ students in choir and so on.

The music department gives students a sense of belonging and connectivity especially those who feel excluded from the rest of the school and its activities. Not many schools (especially state schools) can boast of ex-students, some of whom are now professional musicians, voluntarily coming back to play with current students purely for the fun and enjoyment of it all. The music staffroom is the hub – it is a meeting place for parents, students and teachers and often resembles a railway station with people coming and going.

A fantastic rapport exists between the teachers and students and there is an air of excitement which is reflected in the music making. Every year the teachers seem to extract higher and higher standards from all the students. It is a joy to watch the students perform – they dance and smile and it is obvious that they truly enjoy performing. The parent choir last year was a chance for parents to share the students' excitement and experiences.

Khui Ward, parent

I think all the teachers that my children have been taught by have been extremely good. Being involved in the music programme gives them a sense of belonging and 'community' – I heard a boy remark the other day: "I would not know what I would do if I did not have the music program – I probably would have dropped out in Year 10!"

Parent (2006 School Parent Survey)

Ms McCaw has made the greatest impression on both my oldest child, who has since left the school, and my youngest child, still at the school. Her enthusiasm for music and treatment of the young musicians is amazing. Crowds follow her around wherever she goes. The music performance program at the school is proof.

Parent (2006 School Parent Survey)

Many congratulations on the spectacular evening last night. I was totally blown away by the talent of your students. It is obvious the rapport that you have with your students and the high regard they extend to you. I would like to offer you an open invitation to perform at our school – Benowa State Primary – any time that you are visiting the Gold Coast. Our children would be amazed!!!!

Lyndal Solomon, Music Teacher, Benowa Primary School

After attending Wednesday night's presentation of the school's Gala Concert as a visitor, I felt compelled to send this message to express my appreciation for a very enjoyable evening. Other than a love of music, I have no academic qualifications to provide a professional critique of the performance, but in my opinion I experienced a truly professional event. In addition to the music and singing, the infectious spirit displayed by the conductor and the students was a sheer pleasure. I left the auditorium on a high note (no pun intended). This has been my first experience of musical presentations by the school and I hope it won't be my last."

David Munday, audience member

My son was in SLAB and realised that was his passion. He now is studying Backstage Management at QUT.

Parent, past student

My daughter joined the choir this year. All of her friends were in instrumental music and she doesn't play an instrument. The choir is a great way for her to be involved. She really enjoys it and I loved watching the concert when they did *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Parent, Year 9 student

The instrumental music program is not just about music, but having fun and making friends. SLAB is one of the best parts. It is very enjoyable and rewarding. In the SLAB team I have learnt many new and useful skills, from simple lead rolling to mixing and recording a complete orchestral downmix. These new skills will help me greatly in later life.

Tom, Year 11

I like being an instrumental music person because I always have so much fun. I have also made heaps of friends and music takes my mind off school work. It also puts really good songs in your head. I have learnt so much ...

and I have improved a lot. I have learnt that music is a really important part of my life and I don't know what I'd be doing without it.

Eleina, Year 11

Music makes school bearable.

Ray, Year 12

What can I say? The Ferny Grove High School Instrumental Music Department is one of a kind. Some of my fondest memories of the school revolve around the music myself and fellow students have made in rehearsals and concerts. This program has not only been a place for me to hone my skills as a young musician in a supportive and educational environment, but it has also given me opportunities to develop friendships with students and teachers that otherwise would not exist. I will graduate high school at the end of this year with a bounty of songs that will stay with me forever and warm memories towards the relationships and friendships I've forged.

Jessica, Year 12

The Ferny Grove State High School music program has offered Toby and Emily an exceptional opportunity to enrich their lives through music. The integrity and dedication of the staff has enabled and encouraged a diversity and depth of skills in these and other students, which has led to performance opportunities outside the normal scope of school responsibilities. Our family feels proud and privileged to be a part of a program such as this, and are confident that skills learnt under the guidance of the team at Ferny Grove will offer enhanced opportunities for our children; we are immensely grateful.

David and Cathy Thompson, parents

Involvement with the Instrumental Music Program from a parent's perspective has been an enjoyable and somewhat inspirational ride. The Music Support Committee (MSC) of which I am a member consists mainly of interested parents and also representatives from both staff and students.

I decided to join the MSC as a show of support after witnessing the untiring effort that the staff and support staff had demonstrated in the first year that my son James joined the program. The hours that these guys work is truly phenomenal!

Not long into last year's extensive season of camps, concerts etc., a fellow parent suggested that a parent choir be formed with the intent of performing at one of the concerts scheduled later in the year. At the same time it was decided to keep the organization of the choir and its premiere performance a secret from the students. This led to many raucous and quite amusing evenings labeled covertly as extraordinary MSC meetings! Secrecy, as you could imagine, turned out to be a lot tougher than expected.

ASIO would have been proud of us, the secret was kept right up until the moment the choir walked on stage and, might I add, also to the total amusement, embarrassment and shock of the students. Our performance was such a hit we were invited back for another "gig" at a concert later in the year.

On a serious note, we performed a medley that included two-part singing of which quite a few of the parents didn't have any experience. The choir performed unaided by music or words, and what I did observe was the steady development of the parents in not only their vocal ability but their overall confidence as the rehearsals progressed.

As a result of the enjoyment by all concerned we are looking forward to more opportunities to perform in the coming year.

Lance Hutchinson, parent

What a privilege it has been for the students at Ferny Grove High to be involved in the music program. All students are encouraged to be part of the program, whether in instrumental, choir, technical or backstage. The Gala Concert every year gets bigger and better, I sit in awe of the performers for what they have achieved through the year of rehearsals. This, however, highlights the dedication of the staff. The program allows the students to be a part of a group and not lose their individuality. Each is encouraged to their fullest potential, and this is evident at the concerts when you see them encourage each other and, most of all, enjoy entertaining the audience.

Shelly Torrisi, parent

Appendix 3

Stand with us



Commonwealth Games

Raising a percussion storm

Fran Metcalf

THIERO'S nothing like loud music and a few members of the opposite sex to capture a teenager's attention, but there's more than a party on this group's mind.

Today Ferry Grove State High School's percussion ensemble is performing at Federation Square in Melbourne as part of the largest free cultural festival yet staged in Australia.

Timed to coincide with the Games, the 12-day festival attracts music, dance, art, circus and street-theatre talent from all corners of the Commonwealth.

"These guys have such energy and chemistry with one another," says soprano Metcalf, the ensemble's conductor and head of instrumental music.

at the Brisbane northside high school.

"They really know how to engage an audience and let their bodies play the notes. That's special because it's unusual to find that kind of self-expression and group cohesion in kids their age. It's their musicianship that distinguishes them."

Of the 380 students in Ferry Grove State High School's music program, this eight-person percussion ensemble is the cream of the crop.

They were invited to Festival Melbourne 2006 after performing with Brisbane Birralee Voices choir at Queensland Performing Arts Centre last year.

"Birralee had already been invited to the festival and their artistic director, Julie Christensen, was so impressed with the kids' performance that she per-

suaded the (Melbourne) festival organisers to invite them as well, suggesting they would do just as good a job of accompanying the choir as professional players," explains Metcalf.

The teenagers, aged from 14-17 and ranging from years 10 to 12, will be performing on stage with three different choirs, a string orchestra, a recorder soloist and a vocalist.

They'll be boating, banging, drumming and shaking congas, claves, tom toms, cymbals, triangles and other percussion instruments for a one-hour rendition of the powerful and melodic *Ademus - Songs of Sanctuary*.

It was composed by Welsh musician Kael Jenkins in 1995. It's not the first time this group has performed in front of a

large audience - they earned praise from Brisbane Festival chief executive Lynnan Tennant for their "enthusiasm and on-stage chemistry".

And some of these youngsters hope to find a career in the music business. Some of them - David Spry, Chris Paget and Isaac Cavallaro - already play in a band together.

Others, like Chris Neil and Liz John, hope to make it into the Conservatorium of Music once they finish Year 12. For now, however, all eight of them are content to enjoy the music they're making together.

Any Wednesday afternoon, they can be found together rehearsing in the school's auditorium - always hilarious and snipping among in their socks. "We're one big group that spends a lot of time together," says Paget.



Triple treat opens festival



•Milpera students Ahmad Kanaani and Rakaia Almakry sing out with Ferry Grove State High School students Eirwen Wynn-Hughes and Larissa Corke.

■ Entertainment

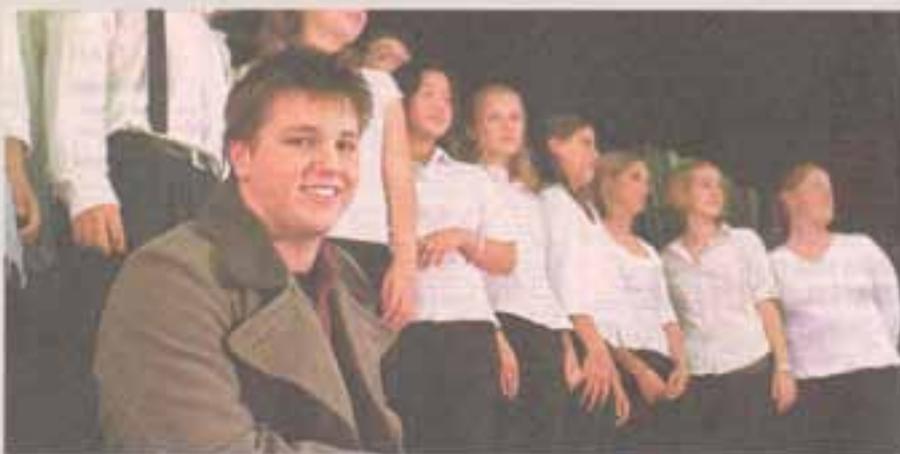
SINGERS from migrant school Milpera State High School will team up with Ferry Grove and Yeronga secondary schools to perform at the Queensland Biennial Festival of Music.

The tri-school joint choir of about 40 pupils had its first rehearsal, at Ferry Grove on June 11, to practise songs for the Alafiah Freedom concert that will open the festival on July 27.

Students will perform songs from choral music to contemporary percussion, rhythm and blues and hip-hop. Project co-ordinator Brian Procopis, of Lifeline Brisbane, said the organisation chose Yeronga and the Chelmer-based Milpera school to be involved because they had a high intake of refugee pupils.

Ferry Grove was chosen for its strong music program and willingness to accept people from different backgrounds. Tickets for the 6pm concert are \$15 for adults and \$10 for concession.

Visit www.qbjm.com.au or phone 3358 8600.



SCHOOL community ... Greg Hallett and fellow Ferry Grove High students rehearse for Little City

Picture: Andrew Massoli

City of hope

THE world was a different place in 1996, but the message in Australian music theatre work *Little City* about the strength of people united – remains unchanged.

Ferry Grove State High School will this week be the first school community to perform *Little City*.

The work is a politically charged piece, written by Irene Villa, that originated out of Melbourne's Kismet years, when communities protested against initiatives they saw as boosting government power and reducing community freedoms.

Performed both in Melbourne and Brisbane, *Little City* is now being performed by Ferry Grove State High to show that "young people can tackle relevant, contemporary works beyond the realm of pop culture or Broadway musicals".

Courier-Mail critic James Harper, who was involved in the original production and who is helping with the present show, says: "The world young people are facing is probably a lot more uncertain than it was in 1996, and the underlying message of *Little City*, that people can achieve much if they work together, is as relevant as ever."

At the end of July, Ferry Grove also will be one of the schools involved in the closing concert of the Queensland Biennial Festival of Music.

Little City directed by Mark Soubir and Stephanie McCook, Brisbane Powerhouse, tomorrow to Friday, 8pm, westerns Friday, 12.30pm, \$25/\$15/\$10, tele: 2794 4000

Greg Hallett, who plays Jimmy in Little City, explains the story behind the show

THE *Little City* years in the future – in the near future, somewhere just down the road.

At first there wasn't a *Little City*, just a Big City. Actually, in our story, we call the Big City "Melbourne", but it could just as easily be called "Brisbane" or "Your Town".

Anyway, I live here. I don't have a home to go to, but everyone knows me. These days I mostly hang out in the park and look at things through the bottom of a bottle.

All sorts of other people live here, people from all over the world, who speak many languages, who have seen all sorts of things.

Aid it used to be a good life, too, in the Big City, and things changed. The City used to fix the roads, maintain the bridges, run the schools and keep the streets clean. Then they

decided that looking after that sort of thing wasn't really their job. It would be better done by businesses that could make some money out of it.

Things started to run down. Rubbish started to pile up. Graffiti started to fall apart. School buildings started to fall apart. Nothing got fixed up.

People changed, too. There wasn't so much "look out for your neighbour", there was more accidents.

There's Magda. Her little boy, Tommy, died when his bike went over the edge of one of those broken down bridges.

Magda's friend Ruby said we shouldn't put up with that sort of thing happening any more. But then one day said, "Let's be careful, don't get too carried away." Everyone wondered whether anything we could do would make a difference.

Then they started to realise. They had all happened before, in many places and times all over the world. When Big Cities lost interest in little people, sometimes those people decided to create new arrangements – their own Little Cities.

There's a song we sing in the show called *Campesinista*. Navea Havana about just such a Little City that happened in South America back in the 1970s.

It comes at the point in our story where we were just realising what was possible. It's a moment of hope.

Unfortunately, there were other forces out in the world that didn't appreciate what we were doing. But if you want to know more about what happened, you'll have to come and see or tell the whole story at the Brisbane Powerhouse this week.

Being your friends.

Ferny Grove musicians to perform at Games

SEVEN Ferny Grove State High School students will travel to Melbourne in March to represent Queensland at the Commonwealth Games – not on the track or in the pool, but on stage.

Mitchell Albury, Isaac Cavallaro, Liz John, Chris Neill, Rebekah Oldfield, Chris Paget and Danielle Searles, make up seven-eighths of the school's Senior Percussion Ensemble, who have been invited to perform at the Commonwealth Games Cultural Festival, a massive international cultural event that runs alongside the Games themselves.

The eighth member of the group, David Spry, completed Year 12 in 2005. He has played such an integral role in the ensemble's development over the last three years that they've invited him back for this special project.

The percussion ensemble is one of 18 groups, including string ensembles, big bands and orchestra, in Ferny Grove's Instrumental Music program. With over 300 students involved, it's one of the most diverse programs of its kind in Queensland.

Ferny Grove's Head of Instrumental Music, Stephanie McCaw, who conducts the percussion ensemble, said the program's emphasis was not only on high quality performance, but also on the camaraderie and mutual enjoyment to be gained from making music together.

"That's something people really notice about this group, in particular," Ms McCaw said. "They appeal to just about any audience because they project, very clearly, the sense that they really like performing together."

The Games Festival will put the percussionists in front of their largest-ever audience. Along with Brisbane's well-known Birralee Voices youth choir, they will appear in



Ferny Grove State High School percussion ensemble students ready to head to Melbourne are, from left, Chris Paget, Elizabeth John, Danielle Searles, Rebekah Oldfield, David Spry, Chris Neill, Isaac Cavallaro and Mitchell Albury.

Melbourne's Federation Square on March 20 in a massed-choir performance of Welsh composer Karl Jenkins' *Songs of Sanctuary*.

Ms McCaw is sure the young players will take the situation in their stride. They are quite used to high-profile events.

The group has been a flagship ensemble for music making at Ferny Grove for several years, performing in venues ranging from Brisbane City Hall to the Convention Centre and the Powerhouse Theatre.

They have attracted praise from professionals, including Queensland Music Festival artistic director Lyndon Terracini, who noted both their "impressive musicianship" and their spirit of enthusiasm in performance.

2006 will be a particularly busy year for the group, with involvement in several other major events including the Brisbane Festival.

The invitation to the Common-

wealth Games Festival was the result of a recommendation to the festival organisers by Birralee Voices' artistic director, Julie Christiansen, after the percussion ensemble took part in Birralee's 10th anniversary concert at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in November last year.

As well as accompanying the massed choirs, the percussionists will also be featuring their own repertoire – works by Australian and New Zealand composers including pieces specially composed for the group by young Brisbane composer, John Parker.

A former Ferny Grove student himself, Parker is also a member of critically acclaimed jazz trio *Misinterprotata*. He is one of several up-and-coming musicians who went through the school's Instrumental Program and have since gone on to build promising professional music careers.

Brisbane Festival

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10 August 2006

Stephanie McCaw
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Dear Stephanie,

Thanks so much for being part of Brisbane Festival 2006! Please pass on my thanks to all the performers in the Ferny Grove Percussion Ensemble. They are an extremely talented group of young artists and it's a credit to you and your music department on their professionalism and talent. I know the audiences who attended thoroughly enjoyed the performance by the group.

Everyone at Brisbane Festival was very happy with how the event went and we would like to thank you for your contribution to the success of the event.

I really hope that we can work together again in the future.

Once again, thanks for all your work in putting together the show.

Kind regards,



Kate Felt
Producer, Brisbane Festival



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