



PRESS KIT

Songs for Kate

A documentary by Tracy Sorensen



Songs for Kate is a documentary following the writing and staging of a chamber opera about the short, tragic life of Kate, sister of Australia's famous bushranger Ned Kelly.

Made by Bathurst filmmaker Tracy Sorensen, the documentary focuses on efforts by writer Merrill Findlay to create and stage a chamber opera about Kate's last days. Merrill's vision is to stage *The Kate Kelly Song Cycle* on the banks of the Forbes lagoon from which Kate's body was dragged in 1898, when she was just 36 years old. The cause of her death - suicide, accident or foul play - remains a mystery.

Merrill Findlay, author of the critically acclaimed novel *Republic of Women* (UQP 1999) grew up on a farm just outside of Forbes in the central west of New South Wales. The documentary follows Merrill as she collaborates with composer Ross Carey to write the song cycle and then tries to persuade the town of Forbes to get behind her ambitious, high-art project.

Along the way, Merrill battles treatment for cancer, a shortage of money to pay for performers and staging, and the difficulties of working with enthusiastic but inexperienced volunteers and choristers.

The storyline in Merrill's opera is based on a piece of historical evidence she uncovered in an 1898 edition of the *Forbes and Parkes Gazette*. A tiny court report - just a centimetre of print - reveals that a few months before Kate died her husband, William "Bricky" Foster, had been charged five pounds, four shillings and ten pence in lieu of three months in jail for what we would now call domestic violence.

In an interview in the documentary, Merrill explains that Bricky Foster, who had been living and working as a horse tailer out of town, returned to his wife the night before Kate disappeared. "If an inquest were done today, the husband would be, if not the prime suspect, at least a person of great interest to the police. But of course none of that was questioned in the inquest in 1898." In the song cycle, we meet Bricky as an old man, now sorry for his treatment of Kate. The other four songs in the cycle are in the voices of local Chinese grocer Quang Lee and Kate herself.

Forbes, in farming country in the central west of New South Wales, has a thriving country music scene and an affection for folk ballads. But Merrill's conviction that she will find supporters and an audience for an hour of "difficult" new music never wavers.

"I think the repertoire is quite narrow out here," says Merrill in the documentary. "And I find a lot of it is settler nationalist sort of stuff that is blokey, that tells stories about a very narrow section of the population, that represents a white masculinist perspective."

Filming and editing of the documentary took place over a two-year period from 2011 to 2013, scheduled around the busy lives of all those involved. The project was entirely unfunded, relying on contributions from students and volunteers: a labor of love, just as was the song cycle itself.

The Kate Kelly Song Cycle, with music by Ross Carey and libretto by Merrill Findlay, was the keynote performance of the inaugural Kalari-Lachlan River Arts festival in Forbes in September 2011. It was sung by Melbourne-based soprano Sian Prior with a chamber orchestra and two community choirs. It was conducted by Orange-based music director William Moxey.

Songs for Kate runs for approximately 50 minutes. It includes adult themes, including suicide and domestic violence, so parental guidance for children recommended.

More information and resources can be found at <http://squawkingalah.com.au/projects/kate-kelly-doco/>

Interviews with Tracy Sorensen, Merrill Findlay, Ross Carey, Sian Prior or Bill Moxey can be arranged on request. Contact Tracy Sorensen by phone 0414 955 049 or by email tsoren@tpg.com.au

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - Tracy Sorensen



“I grew up in a small town: Carnarvon, in Western Australia. In 1984, Merrill Findlay spent some months in town researching a book called *Carnarvon - Reflections of a Country Town*, commissioned by the local shire council for the town’s centenary. The book, when it appeared, was unusual for a commissioned history. It covered the stories not just of white settlers, but of dispossessed Aboriginal people, the southern and eastern European vegetable and banana growers, labourers on the prawning boats and many others often left out of official narratives. When I arrived in the central west NSW town of Bathurst ten years ago, I was delighted to discover that Merrill Findlay lived just a hop, skip and jump away in Forbes. When she asked me to document The Kate Kelly Song Cycle I immediately agreed, even though it was clear there would be no money in it. The themes embodied by the song cycle and by Merrill’s work resonated strongly with me: a girl growing up in a remote, “blokey” town, the love for a landscape one knows intimately, a desire to uncover and tell the stories embedded in that landscape, the desire to escape from one’s origins, and the yearning to return. It was hard work, and it took a long time, but it was a real pleasure to record Merrill’s passionate engagement with the arts, a place and a community.”

Tracy Sorensen’s background is in journalism and community arts. She teaches media at Bathurst TAFE and Charles Sturt University. More information about Tracy is available at www.squawkingalah.com.au

MERRILL FINDLAY - writer/librettist - bio



Merrill Findlay is an Australian writer, scholar, bricoleur, cultural development practitioner, social innovator, gardener, land-carer, traveler, creative risk-taker and

She was born in Condobolin, a small country town in central western New South Wales in the 1950s, and spent most of her childhood on her family’s farm near the village of Bogan Gate. After living in big cities for decades, she has returned to Forbes, another small country town, to be close to her family and the farm she grew up on.

Merrill left her Sydney boarding school in the early 1970s to spend a couple of very bohemian years in Paddington and Potts Point, before beginning her professional writing career. Her publications since then have included a critically acclaimed novel, *Republic of Women*, and numerous essays, speeches, multimedia works and feature articles published in Australia and overseas. In 2011, with composer Ross Carey, she wrote the libretto for The Kate Kelly Song Cycle. Merrill just recently completed a PhD through the Creative Writing Program at Canberra University. Out of this, she plans to produce a work of literary non-fiction about migration and refugees. For more, see <http://merrillfindlay.com>

ROSS CAREY - composer/pianist - bio

Ross Carey is a composer and pianist. Born in Lower Hutt in 1969, he is a graduate from Victoria University of Wellington and Elisabeth Music University in Hiroshima, Japan, where he majored in composition. Since July 2010 Ross has been lecturing in the Faculty of Music at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Shah Alam, Malaysia.



Ross's works have been performed both in New Zealand and abroad. An piece dedicated to harpist Helen Webby, September Song (2000) was premiered at University of Canterbury while Ross was Mozart Fellow at the University of Otago. A recent achievement was the premiere of The Kate Kelly Song Cycle at the first Kalari-Lachlan River Arts Festival in Forbes, Central West New South Wales in September 2011. A collaboration with writer Merrill Findlay and soprano Sian Prior, this celebrated the life of the sister of Australia's folk legend Ned Kelly. As a performer Ross's repertoire is both contemporary and classical. He has played in Australasia, SE Asia, Japan and China, notably at the International Alliance of Women in Music Congress in Beijing in 2008.

For more information about Ross see

<http://music.uitm.edu.my/staff/staff-directory?id=49&task=view>

SIAN PRIOR - soprano - bio



Since graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts Opera Studio, Sian has performed as a guest soprano with Operalive, More Than Opera Co., Sounds Sublime, Opera Sessions, Divas Inc. and Macedon Music. She has sung at the Castlemaine Festival, the Melbourne Writer's Festival, the Ubud Readers and Writers Festival, the Two Fires Festival, the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, the Williamstown Literary festival, and live-to-air on ABC Radio National's Quiz Show and the 774 ABC Melbourne Evening Show. In 2011 she performed The Kate Kelly Song Cycle by Merrill Findlay and Ross Carey in Forbes, NSW.

She has performed and recorded with songwriter Paul Kelly, sung jazz for the AFL, recorded original songs by composers Natalya Wagner, John Hipwell Snr and Darryl Emerson, and done backing vocals for The Stardust Five and Tempo Perdido.

Sian is also a clarinettist and recent concerts include singing and playing clarinet for an international theatre project called 'Ici' (Here) written by playwright Rebecca Lister in the Australian Festival in Divonne-les-Bains, France in September 2012. She has sung at an Opera Sessions concert called 'Crossed Wires' at Austins Winery and The Toff in Town in November 2012; and performed Paul Stanhope's 'Sea Chronicles' song cycle at the Benalla Art Gallery in July 2013. She sang and played clarinet in a Melbourne theatre production about George Bernard Shaw in November 2013. See <http://sianprior.com/>

BILL MOXEY - music director/conductor - bio

A prize-winning graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, William Moxey has appeared as a soloist with many choirs and orchestras, including the Queensland Conservatorium Singers, Queensland University Musical Society, Sydney Philharmonia, Sydney University Musical Society, Macquarie University Singers, Sydney University Graduates Choir, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He also appeared in the inaugural season of the Lyric Opera of Queensland.



William (or Bill) was a member of the Song Company for six years, and appeared at two Adelaide Festivals, a New Zealand Festival, Brisbane's Expo '88, and at concerts in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia as well as many hundreds of performances in Australia.

As a member of the quartet 'Vocalise', he gave concerts for and was recorded by the ABC. Other highlights include working as both soloist and chorister with eminent conductors Christopher Hogwood and David Porcelijn. For seventeen years William Moxey was conductor of Willoughby Symphony Choir. For ten years William was the Musical Director of the acclaimed chamber choir, The Georgian Singers and, for eight years, a staff tutor and Choral Director at the Ronald Dowd National Summer School for Singers, a school which attracts some of the finest young singers in Australia and New Zealand. In 2011 he was musical director of The Kate Kelly Song Cycle, courtesy of Kinross Wolaroi School in Orange.

KATE KELLY IN FORBES

By 1880, when her brother Ned was hanged in Melbourne, Kate was a teenage celebrity. In the century since then she has grown into an Australian legend. Although the first two decades of her life are well documented, relatively little is known of the more mature Kate Kelly who changed her name, left her past behind, and settled in Forbes on the Lachlan River in central NSW.

Although local folklore about Kate Kelly is tantalizingly rich in Forbes, little hard evidence of her life in the town survives. The thin trail of historical evidence reveals that she married a William “Brickie” Foster in Forbes in 1888 and bore at least six children (only three survived infancy). The body of Catherine Foster, as she was known in Forbes, was found in the local lagoon more than a week after a neighbour reported her missing in October 1898.



Actress Sinead Curry as Kate

The magistrate who conducted the inquest concluded that Kate was “found drowned in the lagoon on the Condobolin Road ... but there was no evidence to show how deceased got into the water.”

When she died, Kate had recently given birth to a baby girl. This baby died shortly afterwards. Her three surviving children - Freddie, Gertrude and Ethel - were taken back to Eleven Mile Creek in Victoria to be raised by Kate and Ned’s mother, Ellen Kelly.

Kate Kelly is played by actress Sinead Curry in dramatised sequences in Songs for Kate. Sinead was a former student of director Tracy Sorensen in the communications school at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. More information about Sinead is available at this link: <http://www.sineadcurry.net/>

THE KATE KELLY SONG CYCLE

The Kate Kelly Song Cycle, by librettist Merrill Findlay and composer Ross Carey, consists of sixty minutes of new classical music for soprano voice, violin, cello, clarinet, piano accordion and community choirs. Its premiere performance was on the banks of the Forbes lagoon on Sunday, September 4, 2011 as the headline act of the Kalari Lachlan River Arts Festival. It was performed by soprano Sian Prior and conducted by musical director Bill Moxey. The chamber orchestra consisted of Elizabeth Jones on accordion, Rachel Whealy (cello), Martin Lee (violin), and Justin Screen (clarinet). The parts for community choir were sung by the Forbes Shire Choir and the Forbes Seniors Choir.

LYRICS

Note: copyright over these lyrics belongs to Merrill Findlay. They are to be used only for the purposes of background to aid understanding of the Songs for Kate documentary. Enquiries for any other purpose should be directed to Merrill Findlay merrill@merrillfindlay.com

Bricky's Sorry Song

I'm now too old to mount a horse
Too old to raise my fist
Though not too old to raise my glass
Or boast at the pub 'bout my youth
As a drinker, a fighter, a horseman
No-one could beat me then
Except for she who's still haunting me
As a ghost from the Forbes Lagoon

Kate me darlin', what would I do,
If you was 'ere with me now?
What could I say, what could I do
To make you love me again?

She could have done better than me, I know
Could have married my brother instead
Artie was sober and straight and in love
But Kate loved horses more than we men
The only time I saw her happy
Was breaking in colts at South Park
Whispering sweet nothings into their ears
Till they did whatever she asked
So what did I, a jealous man, do?
I forbade her from riding again
She disobeyed me, of course
So I lashed out again
And I hit her ...

Kate me darlin', what would I do
If you was 'ere with me now?
What could I say, what could I do
To make you love me again?

I bashed the woman I cherished
Even when she was with child

Hit her and shouted abuse at her
And even the police couldn't stop me
Because it wasn't against the law
But Kate, she never let me forget
What a mean mongrel I was
She even tried to kick me out
So what did I, a jealous man, do?
I raised my hand and hit her
Knocked her to the floor

Kate me darlin', what would I do
If you was 'ere with me now?
What could I say, what could I do
To make you love me again?

So I got a job at Big Burrawang
Horse taylor for Tom Edols and Co
Feeding and watering the horses at dusk
Bringing them back to the camp at dawn
The station was 300,000 acres then
The biggest shearing shed in the world
I lived in the barracks with the single men
And we drank and fought and whored
On pay day I'd ride thirty miles into Forbes
Leave some cash for Kate and the kids
And yes, it's true
I was with her the night before the day she left
But ... I. Did. Not. Kill. Her ...
Though Brigit, the wife of my brother Ernie
Swears black and blue that I did
You drove here to her death, Brigit says
Instead of giving her support
You raised your fist and hit her
Hit her. Hit her
Now hang your head in shame

Kate me darlin', what would do
If you was 'ere with me now?
What could I say, what could I do
To make you love me again?

Now I'm too old to mount a horse
Too old to argue and fight
A lonely old bloke, a bush battler
If there's one thing I've learned
In all my years
It's that blokes like me are fools
We've bashed, burned, shot and polluted
Chopped down everything in our way
And if I had my life all over again
I wouldn't live it in the same way
But at least I know now what I'd do
If me darlin' Kate was still 'ere with me

I'd say I'm sorry, forgive me, help me please
And show me how to change

What could I do, what could I say
To make you love me again?
I'm sorry, forgive me, help me please
And show me how to change

I'm sorry, forgive me, help me please
And show me how to change

The Harvest Moon In Spring

When the Harvest Moon hangs low over old Guangzhou

When last sheaf of rice has been threshed
It's Zhong Qiu Jie on the Zhujiang Delta
Time to celebrate what we've reaped
With mooncakes and coloured lanterns
And prayers to Moon Mother Chang'e
But here the year's all upside down
The Harvest Moon rises in Spring
Yet I still hang the Zhong Qiu lanterns
And bake mooncakes for my friends
Like that young Mrs Foster up the street
Who thanked me in Cantonese
Do jeh, do jeh saai, she'd say
Neih sihk jo faahn meih a?
A friend Ah Joe taught her, she told me once
Though she rarely spoke of her past
I'd always give her kiddies sweets
Whenever they came into my shop
Young Freddie and the little girls
I'd tell them stories from old Guangzhou
About the Moon Lady and her jade rabbit
I told Freddie he'd be able to see thme
Next time the moon was full
The jade rabbit with his mortar and pestle
Pounding his magic medicine
The elixir of eternal life
Can Mummy have some 'lixir too?
Young Freddie asked one day
Because she has been feeling very sad
What could I tell the boy?
That the rabbit was just a legend?
But I wish I'd listened better now
Because by next full moon
His mummy had disappeared

Mr Sullivan found her body in the billabong
Behind Ah Toy's garden near the old stone bridge
Constable Garstang brought it into town
To Mrs Ryan's Hotel across the road
We locals kept vigil on my veranda
And gossiped while we waited for news
Some thought it was suicide
Or that she slipped and fell
While others assumed foul play
Her husband's a prime suspect
A brute when he's drunk, they say
Though she covers her bruises up well
The coroner should've answered our questions
About who, how, why, where and when
But his findings were inconclusive
Not enough evidence, he said

But the truth no longer matters
For Mrs Foster and her friends
Because now she's tasted the moon rabbit's medicine
She has become immortal, a legend, a myth
So when the Harvest Moon hangs low on the Lachlan
When it's time to celebrate what we've reaped
I hang the red lanterns on my veranda
Bake mooncakes for my friends
And remember that young Mrs Foster
Do jeh, do jeh saai
Neih sihk jo faahn meih a?

Ghosts of Glenrowan

I'm galloping, galloping 'long the Lachlan
Trying to escape my past

But the flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
No matter where I go
Or how fast

Those charcoal stumps on the old pub floor
They can't be Steve and Dan
And the body tied to the Benalla door
It's not my friend Ah Joe
Nor the young man swinging from the gallows
He's not my brother Ned ...
Yet the memories keep flashing inside of me
Hauntingly, accusingly
They must be true like people say
I wish they'd just go away

So I'm galloping, galloping 'long the Lachlan
Trying to flee the horror
The flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
No matter where I go
Nor how fast

When Fitzpatrick knocked on the door that night
He said it was to arrest Dan
But it was me he was really after
Everything else was libel and lies
My mum never hit him
Like he said she did
And Ned never fired a shot
All they did was demand of him
That he do the right thing by me
A matter of family honour, Ned said
Though he could never say that to a judge

But what could I do?
I was only fourteen at the time

So I'm galloping, galloping 'long the Lachlan
Trying to forgive myself
But the flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
No matter where I go
Or how fast

Mum went to jail with the baby
All because of Fitzpatrick's lies
Ned and Dan became wanted men
Hiding out in the Wombat Hills
My younger brother Jim was already inside
For a couple of horses he sold
Which left Maggie and me and little Grace
Back home at Eleven Mile Creek
To feed the stock, milk the cows
Churn the butter, look after the kids
And supply the boys as well
With ammunition, food and news

So I'm galloping, galloping 'long the Lachlan
Trying to forget who I am
But the flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
No matter where I go
Or how fast

Forbes is nice but I feel so alone
Few even know my real name

I'm afraid that if I told them the truth
They'd all think badly of me
Hugh McDougall from Warroo
The Smiths of Cadow
The Luthjes, Gunns and Prows
Have been so good to me
And my in-laws, the Fosters, are kind
But I miss the comfort of my own family
Especially Maggie, Dan and Ned
I need them now so desperately
Especially when my husband's in town
If my brothers knew they'd shoot him
As for my mother, all she'd probably say is
You silly girl, I told you so

I'm galloping, galloping 'long the Lachlan
Trying to leave this world behind
But the flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
No matter where I go
Or how fast

The flames, the flames, the memories
Are burning me, overwhelmingly
The flames, the flames, the memories

Poor Irish and Wiradjuri

I see her on the river bank
I see her down the street
Ellen Googoolin
Yellow Belly Woman
Who reminds me of Ellen my mum
Not because they look the same
Poor Irish and Wiradjuri
It's s more to do with attitude
They're Warrior Women, these Ellens
Fighting against the odds

They drink and swear and misbehave
Have troubles with the law
Not so much for what they do
More for who they are
Poor Irish and Wiradjuri

One's been here since time began
Since thousands of grandmothers ago
The other sailed across the sea
From Baile Meánach, Éirinn
A little girl with a big family
One tells me ancient tales
Which all begin right here
Baime, Kurikuta and Wawi
The other tales from far away
Saint Pádraig, Brigit and Colum Cille
Aes sídhe, Cú Chulainn, and Temair na Ri
So many different legends
Yet some almost the same
'Bout things you know in your heart are true
Yet no-one else can see
Like bugeeyn, bunyips and spirit people
Banshees, fairies and leprechauns
Poor Irish and Wiradjuri

But the stories of these Ellens
That I like most of all
Are about freedom, justice and liberty

Heroes fighting for our destiny
Like Pemulwuy
In 1788
Wolfe Tone and the United Irish
1798
Windradyne and his clansfolk
1824
Dan O'Connell, the Emancipator
And, of course, our own Cú Chulainn
My brother Ned
And his Republic of East Gippland
Poor Irish and Wiradjuri

These are the stories they told me
The Yellow Belly Woman
And Ellen my Mum
Two Warrior Women
Fighting against the odds
Who drink and swear and misbehave
Have troubles with the law
Not so much for what they do
More for who they are
Poor Irish and Wiradjuri

I heard the banshee cry

Last night I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind
A message from the Otherworld
That someone soon will die

Alone after midnight
No moon in the sky
Pacing the floor with my baby
Trying to feed her, hush her, settle her down
A branch knocking on the window
Something scraping, scratching 'cross the roof
Then a strange, unearthly kind of sound
From somewhere near the lagoon
A weeping, wailing, sobbing
Like the stories my grandmother told
It sounded to me like a banshee cry ...
Or was it a fox or curlew?

I think I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind

The flickering flame of the candle
Coals glowing red in the grate
I sat in the chair by the fireplace
Holding my baby in my arms
Shivering, shaking, I didn't dare move
Remembering my grandmother's warning
Don't ever look into a banshee's eyes, my girl
Else she'll drag you down to a bog

And drown you ...

I think I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind
A message from the Otherworld
Who was it for?
Was it me?

I closed my eyes so I couldn't look
I really don't want to drown
Though there are days, I admit

When all I want to do is die
Others when I wouldn't be dead for quids
Like today, when Susan, my neighbour, and I
Took the kids for a walk to Chinaman's Bridge
Mr Quong Lee was sitting on his veranda
He gave us moon cakes and sugarplum sweets
Grannie Foster was in her garden next door
She gave us roses for our hats
Ah Toy was planting his cabbages
In his patch down by the bridge
He pulled fresh carrots for the kids to eat
Then we walked by the lagoon back home
Freddie skimming stones 'cross the water
The little girls chasing the ducks

And yet I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind
A message from the Otherworld
Who was it for ...?

Such everyday ordinary is lovely to me
After some of the places I've lived
Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide
I was famous back then
People even paid to see me ride
Wrote stories for the Argus and Bulletin
That were almost always lies
But there's nothing in a big city
For a country girl who can't read or write
I'm much better off with my children
And everyday ordinary in Forbes

And yet I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind

But bugger the banshee on a day like today
She can keen and wail all she likes
I'm not ready yet for the Otherworld
I'm staying here to grow old and wise
To tell wild stories to my grandkids
About that other life I led
The great-grandparents from Ireland
Their famous great uncles and aunts
Maggie, Dan, Jim and Ned
Who shared my life in that Other Place
Our farm on Eleven Mile Creek

And yet I heard the banshee cry
Wailing on the wind
A message from the Otherworld

SCORE AND RECORDING

Enquiries about the musical score and the complete recording of the Kate Kelly Song Cycle should be directed to Merrill Findlay merrill@merrillfindlay.com