

Music and Verse at Benalla Bush Muster

Music and verse at Benalla, wild storms in Melbourne. Beautiful Benalla Lake, walking-paths wet and muddy, ducks needed rubber-boots!

Friday-night kicked-off with *Shannon... Come home*. A concert starring Christine Middleton as orator, performers; Tim Sheed as 'Shannon' and Jill Meehan the show's author, with emotional acting and music, brought the awareness of rural farmers, affected by drought conditions, causing hardship and suicidal tendencies brought on by depression.

The annual Bush Muster weekend was active and alive with so much talent displayed. Stephen Whiteside and Maggie Sommerville performed Squizzy Taylor a notorious Melbourne gangster of old, with Stephen smoking a kazoo, wearing a coat and sporting sunglasses and typical Squizzy-style black hat. Then came a Ned Kelly 'rap-dance', they are such a versatile pair.

Sue Pearce was awarded best poet of the Muster and Jim Carlisle the barber of Benalla, best Yarnspinner, the audience's choices, both highly talented, and calm easy-going acts. A lady feeling chilly in the hall requested a loan of one of Tony Lambides-Turner's scarves, leaving only five around his neck! M. C. Colin Milligan raved on about different ways to administer a tablet to a cat. Some devoted cat-lovers were pulling their whiskers out! Another M.C. Ken Jones of Bendigo, wearing a shiny-waistcoat, replaced his usual shorts for long trousers, telling jokes about his cuddly midriff.

Maurie Foun of the poet's 'Resting Place' at Towong conducted a workshop on performance and microphone technique, he was also the anchor M.C. telling his long running humorous piece about Billy a young car-driver caught by a cop!

Dona McQueen was Victorian Song Champion with long tall Irishman, Richard Bushnell runner up. Dona also won Novice Poet. A team of musicians and poets came from Geelong amongst them was Andy Mac who enjoyed his debut in the Novice poets section with our traditional audience's standing-ovation. Winner of 'Original Song' Rick Webb aka 'Rusty Tin' musician, on tea-chest slap-bass, accompanied Claudia Collins on guitar; indeed a very entertaining pair – Ozzie Mozzies!. Rick calling on his past experiences as a sound-engineer shared his skills and knowledge to eager ears.

Jan Lewis, secretary of the Victorian Bush Poets and Musicians Association (VBPMA), and organiser of the Benalla Muster, her hard-working dedication always shines through at every festival. Friends meeting-up again, chatting over the excellent meals served at the venue, the Benalla Bowling Club. All a bit older and bolder, with local and visitors attended the 'Seniors-week' variety concert. To sum up; I'd say a relaxed, warm and friendly festival.

Your roving reporter Jan C. Morris /

Chelsea Heights.