

A musical career with strings attached



Musician Philip Trigg runs through a few bars of Bach in his studio at Purnim West, which is still surrounded by the dairy farms of his youth.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]M[/dropcap]usician **Philip Trigg** is the sort of person who would be quite content as a drummer for Abba or a keyboardist for the Bee Gees: part of the show, but happily anonymous.

And while Philip's skill is in playing classical rather than pop music, he has been part of the south-west music scene for virtually his whole adult life as a violinist, cellist, pianist and teacher of all three instruments.

It is not, perhaps, the usual path for a kid who grew up surrounded by dairy farms in Purnim West – where he still lives – and who attended the rough-and-tumble-trade-driven school, Warrnambool North Tech (now part of Warrnambool College).

“There were certainly no music lessons at school, so I had to take private lessons outside of school with Miss McConachie,” Philip says.

Miss McConachie – who everyone still refers to only as Miss McConachie, never by her first name – was a legendary music teacher in Warrnambool and she proved to be an influential force on Philip.

“Miss McConachie would keep telling me I had to feel the music, to imagine I had a string on the end of my nose attached to the piano keys and bend right into it, but I always struggled,” he says, smiling.



A school-aged, curly hair Philip Trigg on violin (centre) in a newspaper clipping from the Portland Observer.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]F[/dropcap]rustrated by Philip's slow progress with the piano, Miss McConachie made a number of suggestions to her young student that would prove pivotal.

The first was to encourage him to choose another instrument alongside the piano: either classical guitar or violin. He chose the violin.

The second was to join the [Warrnambool Theatre Company](#) as an accompanist under the direction of the late **Cyril** and **Joyce Haywood**, to boost his confidence by taking his music to the stage.

And the third was to recommend he read a love story written in 1904 by American author, Myrtle Reed, called "*The Master's Violin* " that appears to [leave a lasting impression](#) on all those who read it.

"I don't remember much about the story line now," Philip says, holding a precious copy of Reed's book, "but I know it really made an impact on me at the time.

"Miss McConachie believed that you never really feel music until you experience sorrow and I came to understand that, especially as you go through various relationships in your life."

The weeping, soaring, sweeping sounds that can come from a violin or cello proved to be the ones that grabbed hold of Philip's heart.

"There is so much more feeling you can get from a violin. When you play a note on a piano, there is only so much you can do with that one note, but a note on a violin can go anywhere," he explains.



Philip, third from right, with the original members of the Cindy Lee Ensemble that started 25 years ago and is still going strong. Image: Cindy Morgan.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"]A[/dropcap]ll three instruments – violin, cello and piano – are now constants in Philip's life and he moves between all three, depending on the occasion.

Those early links with the WTC led to his becoming a founding member of the **Cindy Lee Ensemble**, started by **Cindy Morgan** 25 years ago, and he still plays piano accompaniment for the vocal group each Tuesday night in Koroit.

He has also played violin and cello with the **Warrnambool String Quartet** and the **Robin Wright Strings**, and teaches music at Emmanuel College, Kings College and Timboon P-12, together with private lessons.

One of his most memorable achievements, if a little unusual, was to be part of a marathon session more than 10 years ago in Port Fairy, where a group of pianists played a work by French

composer, Erik Satie, for 24 hours non-stop.

Each musician played an electronic keyboard for two hours and Philip managed to complete his stint, despite some larrikin literally pulling the plug on the instrument twice.

“I just kept playing with no sound coming out. After all, the show must go on!”

While Philip is regularly on stage, including as an accompanist during the annual City of Warrnambool Eisteddfod, he rarely performs solo.

“I like the accompanist role: the show can’t go on without us, but I would prefer that you didn’t know I was there,” he laughs.



Having started with piano in secondary school, Philip found he had more strings to his musical bow and learnt both violin and cello which, he believes, can evoke so much more feeling from each note.

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