



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY NUNZIO MONDIA

COVID CONVERSATIONS

Book 2 - 6

Interviews with the City of Vincent local musicians.



CITY OF VINCENT



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2-6 Interviews with the City of Vincent local musicians

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Covid Conversations Documentary Official Youtube Video Link:

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmXNVq3yEIA>



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1 Beryl & George Long

Nunzio Mondia Tell us who you are and give us a brief history with regards to growing up in Perth.

Beryl Long My name is Beryl Long. I'm 91 years of age and I'm happily married to George. We've had 69 years together and two lovely kids. We are still doing work in our home at Mount Pleasant, we love the garden and enjoy our family very much. The first rates I paid was to Perth City Council. I was born in Peach Street in 1929, February the 7th, and I went to North Perth School. I learnt the piano from Mollie Kavanagh, who lived in Woodville Street, North Perth, and I also learnt highland dancing. My sister and I both learnt highland dancing and she won the Open Championship Dewar Cup twice, and I had two championships in 1939 and 40. But after having Diphtheria, that finished my dancing days and my mother said, 'Well, concentrate on your music, it will probably be more to you,' and it was.

Beryl Long In 1948 I did my first professional job and that was in the Town of Vincent at the Royal Park Bowling Club. It was a 21st birthday. I remember that well [laughter].

Nunzio Mondia Was that first professional gig performed on Piano or accordion?

Beryl Long The piano. I never played the accordion professionally. As a matter of fact, the instrument was far too heavy for me, so I just put it away in the box.

Nunzio Mondia What other venues were active in the area?

Beryl Long [Coughing] Pardon me. Oh, well, a lot at the bowling club because later the bowling club had dances on Saturday nights. I did quite a lot of work there, and at the North Perth Town Hall. There was a hall on Farmer Street. I just can't think what... It could have been the tennis club, but I'm not sure. There was a church hall on Leake Street and my sister had dancing classes there. A few jobs there, they are the only ones I can remember in North Perth. I was born in number seven Peach Street. We were married in 1951 and I bought the house, number nine, next door to my mother and we lived there until 1979.

Nunzio Mondia What can you remember about growing up in this area of Vincent? Is Peach Street located in North Perth?

Beryl Long That was in North Perth. Yes. Well, my parents had a dairy first. My mother used to milk twenty-seven cows and then deliver the milk with a horse and cart. Then I came along. That was North Perth. She had the first sewered dairy in Perth. Then they turned to nursery work. They grew vegetables, and flowers, and my mother won a few awards from the Royal Show. The blue ribbon for an arrangement of flowers, and vegetables, she had plenty of awards for those too.

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Nunzio Mondia Do you see any correlation between, today's world and the past? Are we heading back into a world with home deliveries, similar to the past, where milk, fish, bread, newspaper were regular home delivery items?

Beryl Long I don't really know. The dairy really started because there was a mother whose doctor had said, 'If you can get one cow's milk for your child, it'll have more chance in life.' She came to see Mum because Mum only had one cow then and that started it off.

That's how she got one cow after the other and the milking. I was the youngest of five children, so I didn't really know my sisters and brother because they're so much older and they had all left by the time I was growing up.

Nunzio Mondia Share with us your memories of the music scene and clubs that were active within the community back then.

Beryl Long Well, one lovely club I played for was a widow and widower's club. You couldn't get into that club unless you showed the death certificate of your husband or wife, and that was a lovely club. You know, they were really caring and looked after each other. It's quite sad, really, to see them when they came in for the first time. I played for them for 15 years every Thursday night.

Nunzio Mondia A social club?

Beryl Long Yes, every Thursday night, and it gave them a lot of comfort. They met new people and it was hard for them when they first came, but they got better.

Beryl Long [COVID] brought back memories of when I was in the infectious hospital for four months and that was awful because I had no visitors. I didn't see my family for four months. I went in April and I came out in August.

Nunzio Mondia Why no visitors? Tell me a little more.

Beryl Long I was very sick when I was admitted to the hospital, and as I said in my story [local history award entry], you laid on your back. I think it was the antitoxin they injected into you that affected your heart. So, you laid on your back. I don't know how they worked it out, but you got one pillow, then you got two pillows, and you got three pillows and then you could sit up. That was terrible, and there were only babies around me, maybe kids in cots and no one to talk to, only perhaps a nurse would come along.

That did make me think about that, yes. My daughter lives in the Southwest, and they wanted us to go down there. I said, 'No, you've got your home and we've got ours.' So, she gave up her job for about eight weeks and came up. We were really locked down [laughter]. She did all our shopping and looked after us, took us to our appointments and everything. So really, we were isolated then too. [Laughter]

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Nunzio Mondia How did that make you feel?

Beryl Long Well, she didn't live with us. She has a home in Perth not far from us. She came round every morning at eleven o'clock with her flask, to sit on the front veranda and we were in the lounge room.

Nunzio Mondia No hugging.

Beryl Long No hugging. She was on the veranda. Her husband didn't come up because he wasn't allowed to. He had a permit to come to work, but otherwise, he couldn't come into Perth from the southwest, so we didn't see him for quite a few weeks.

Nunzio Mondia And what about your grandchildren?

Beryl Long I've got one granddaughter who has two little girls, and we didn't see them from about March. On Easter Sunday they came, but they stood on the back veranda, and we just waved to them. No cuddlies, no. Two lovely, great-granddaughters.

Beryl Long Well, not really, because we love the garden, and I do a lot of cooking. And we could read.

Nunzio Mondia Not a lot of change for you and George ?

Beryl Long No, we mainly missed going out for a meal or going to the pictures.

Nunzio Mondia With the gradual easing of restrictions, have you started going out more regularly or kept within the restrictions.

Beryl Long Oh, I think we've gone out more, we do our own shopping now. We haven't been to the theatre or anything, but we can go out in our garden for a couple of hours.

Nunzio Mondia Give us your views on 'panic buying'?

Beryl Long Well, I can't see any sense in it really. I just shop to get what I need. I can't understand why they are doing it. Or I just think, 'Well, good luck with all that stuff, perhaps it will go off.'

George Long What about the neighbour? Our neighbours across the road?

Beryl Long Jog my memory please, George. [Brief discussion not transcribed] I think it at least six of our neighbours came over one by one and said, "If you need anything or shopping, just please let us know." I thought that was lovely. Then one neighbour who had hardly ever acknowledged us, one day put his head out of the

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car window. 'How are you off for toilet rolls? Because if you want any, I've got plenty.' [Laughter] Yes, I had forgotten about that.

Nunzio Mondia [Laughter] That's funny. So, let's put, us, this generation into perspective. Let's go back to the days of the war [WW2] and when you were growing up. People are panicking about toilet paper today. Enlighten us. Just give us an idea of what it was like to be in an era of rations. Was toilet paper an issue back then?

Beryl Long Well, I don't think so, but I do remember the rationing. The food was rationed, and you didn't have many pieces of steak. I remember it would have been about 1942, that's the day Darwin was bombed. My brother-in-law came down from Geraldton. He was a cook in the Air Force. He came down because he was being sent to New Guinea, and he had hit a kangaroo on the way down. He strapped it on the front of the car, he had a gas producer on the back and this damn kangaroo. Of course, that was a treat. My parents stripped it of the fur and everything, and we had beautiful kangaroo steak for a while. [Laughter]

George Long And kangaroo skin mats.

Beryl Long Yes. My sister and her two children lived with us through the war. Then the other sister married. Her husband was in the Air Force. He was stationed at Melville Island, and they were bombed out. He came back just in the clothes he was wearing. I do remember all the rationing; we didn't have many meat meals. But because my parents had chickens and ducks, we did well with that, but we didn't have much beef. That's one memory.

Beryl Long The city in those days was full of American soldiers. I used to go to Murray Street for dancing lessons. Mum said, "Don't talk to anyone, just stand there until the teacher opens up for the afternoon." But no, it was chock-a-block, some were drunk and the Aussies having a fight with the Yanks, and it wasn't a very nice place.

Nunzio Mondia How did it feel coming out of the war period?

Beryl Long I can remember when my sister was married in 1944. I don't think she had many wedding presents because there wasn't very much to buy. The main thing was that she was married and happy.

My music? I did play the piano for a while after I stopped doing weddings. I retired, I thought. I went to the City of Perth Town Hall, someone was sick. It was the old-time dance on a Wednesday night, and I worked there for 18 years, on Wednesday nights. Then the lady playing on a Monday night got sick. I worked Monday night, Saturday night and sometimes Friday. So that was my time with the City of Perth Town Hall.

This year they were commemorating the hundred and fiftieth birthday, and a couple of years ago they were asking if anybody had any memorabilia. George rang them and said he had DVDs of what he had filmed, he used to go up onto the balcony. He

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was a doorman, I got him a job as a doorman. The girls came out from the City of Perth council, and they were delighted. That was shown, they couldn't have the show in the hall because of COVID, but they had it on the computer. It's still on, I think, 'till Christmas. They show lovely views of the City of Perth Town Hall and dance. It's on the computer. If you get it up, you can see it all.

Nunzio Mondia How many gigs would you average per week?

Beryl Long Well, usually in my early days, it was Friday and Saturday. It would have been, I can't think when I started. It might be 1987 or 1988 when I went in just for that night and ended up for all those years. Always Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday.

Nunzio Mondia It must have been challenging back in that era for a young female to develop a career as a working musician?

Beryl Long Oh, no, my mother she encouraged me because we all learnt the piano. The others, my sisters and brother gave it away, but I didn't. I was playing one day at home. I always remember I was playing 'Sentimental Journey', and my mother sold cut flowers at [the back door of our home] in Peach Street. A lady said to my mother, 'Who's playing the piano?' She said, 'My daughter.' She said, 'She keeps good time, is she interested in a job?' My mother said, 'I think she would be.' She said, 'I'll come round and talk to her.' I came out the back door where Mum was selling the flowers. She said, 'How would you like some work?' I said, 'I'd love that.' I got her cast-offs. [Laughter] She got a better job and that's how it started.

Nunzio Mondia Excellent. What are some of your favourite tunes.

Beryl Long Oh, I like 'Sentimental Journey', I like 'I Only Have Eyes for You', 'If I Should Fall in Love Again'. I like the classics, and 'I'll Buy That Dream', do you know that one?

Nunzio Mondia No.

Beryl Long It's lovely. I'll show you the music one day if you'd like, I've still got it.

Nunzio Mondia Great thank you.

Beryl Long One time I was playing at the Carlisle Hotel [Victoria Park] every Saturday afternoon. That was a funny story too, because the ladies came from their shopping, and they'd have all their shopping spewing around on the floor. [Laughter] One day one of them dropped a packet of washing powder... I'd then go onto Wembley Lodge or somewhere and do a wedding breakfast, and you'd be tired by the end of that day.

Nunzio Mondia So now let's fast forward to the COVID period and focus on the impact that Covid had on artists and musicians.

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Beryl Long Mmm [they've] had a hard time.

Nunzio Mondia Shall we chat about that? Just imagine all your gigs packing up. The doorman wouldn't have a job either. What are your thoughts?

Beryl Long Well, I think it would be very sad, and although it's a job, it's nice because you do nice weddings. It was nice, and I'm sure I would have missed it, but not doing it anymore, you don't.

Nunzio Mondia Imagine all your foreseeable gigs cancelled?

Beryl Long Yes, they really rely on that income, but we do miss going to the theatre and going to the beaches.

Nunzio Mondia OK, cool. [Noise of box containing Beryl's red accordion being opened] Ok there we are.

Beryl Long Oh, I'm so happy for you to have a look at it. [Unclear]

Nunzio Mondia And you have your name printed on the accordion.

Beryl Long Oh, Harry Black that was his suggestion, another few dollars, I guess.

Nunzio Mondia Would you like to have a tinkle first?

Beryl Long I wouldn't be able to, no.

Nunzio Mondia Oh, ok. Sorry. This is the accordion. Oh, here we go. Let me have a look.

George Long I haven't looked at it for many years.

Beryl Long Yes, I'd say all those years, since 1958 I reckon, it's been untouched.

Nunzio Mondia Ok let's make music on this accordion.

Beryl Long Oh, lovely. That'll make me happy.

Nunzio Mondia [Nunzio Playing the accordion and noise of the keys]

Beryl Long I bet it has got a few little... [accordion music playing] That's lovely. Oh, you can play it.

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Nunzio Mondia [Accordion music and air leaking from the instrument] Yes, it definitely has an air leak in the bellows. A common issue with older accordions.

Nunzio Mondia [Accordion music] What about, do you know, Volo del' Angele? [?]
[Accordion music playing Volo del' Angelle]

Beryl Long Oh, that's marvellous, Nunzio. [Clapping]

Nunzio Mondia It's leaky...

Beryl Long It is a wonder that it goes, [Laughter]

Nunzio Mondia It does play ok.

Beryl Long It's been in the garden shed.

Nunzio Mondia Yeah, that's all it needs. Just a little servicing.

Beryl Long You know, it did look beautiful, I wouldn't have even been 30 when my mother bought me that. I couldn't handle it.

Beryl Long It was a mistake to buy something that big.

Nunzio Mondia Yeah.

Beryl Long [Oh, that's lovely.]

Nunzio Mondia Thank you. You should consider buying a smaller sized accordion.

Beryl Long Nunzio said it has got a leak, I didn't even think it would go. [Laughter]

Nunzio Mondia Did you sing at your gigs?

Beryl Long Me. Ooh, no, no,.

Nunzio Mondia No singing, just playing. [He puts the instrument down].

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George Long Nice to hear that it works.

Nunzio Mondia Yes it does work. So, times have changed, and people in today's fast-moving world seem to be under increased pressure more than ever. From your experience, what advice can you offer to our current and future generations?

Beryl Long One thing I wish them, I hope is that they'll always be as happy as we have been and enjoy their family. Our great-granddaughters, although they're so young now, I just hope they have a wonderful life too.

Nunzio Mondia How long have you been married?

Beryl Long 69 years.

Nunzio Mondia So what is the secret? [Noise of a mobile phone in the background]

Beryl Long I think first, you've got to really love somebody to spend all that time together and give and take. We've been blessed with a lovely family.

George Long When Beryl was playing in the early days before and just before we were married, she was driven to the jobs in a T-model Ford by her mother.
[Laughter]

Nunzio Mondia Any other comments you would like to express?

Beryl Long Well, I just would like to thank the City of Vincent too. I was very surprised to win something for my story and the photos [Local History Awards 2020]. I was very surprised. My daughter just wanted to pass them on so people could see them. I think it was Catherine who said, 'Why don't you enter them?' George won and we were just really shocked. It was a lovely experience, I'm very happy.

George Long My thoughts are with the elderly that cannot help themselves and are not getting very much help at all. They think they're going into a comfortable, not a retirement, a comfortable few years in the last years of their life, and some of them have been treated badly. We only hear about the bad stuff, but I guess there are some good ones.

Nunzio Mondia Yes, much care is needed with the elderly who live on their own. What message would you like to send to your family?

Beryl Long We are blessed with a good family.

George Long We haven't had any problems with our family. Well, nothing serious. The boy was late home one night, but there was a reason, he was with a friend of his and he went to the Speedway. I thought he should be back at a certain time, and he wasn't, time drags on. Finally, he comes home, 'Where have you been Alan?' 'Oh, when we got out of the Speedway, the cops were out in front of the cemetery, and

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they were catching all these kids along the road.' They all thought they were speedway riders and the police were catching them. Our son and his mates thought that was great. He had my car at the time.

Beryl Long That was all he was worried about. [Laughter]

Nunzio Mondia So, in this post-COVID world, what advice do you have for our younger generation regarding Covid?

George Long Well, if they obey the restrictions that we must put up with if they obey that, they should be safe. We must follow the rules. We haven't had any problems with any of our family yet. Times will get better, times were tough for us too, at the start, but between us, we battled through.

Beryl Long I can live without going out.

George Long We don't get out a lot. We stay at home and look after each other, really.

Nunzio Mondia That's a good decision, isn't it?

George Long So to the younger ones, look after your parents when they get old. Our children do. Our daughter has been exceptional the last few months or for years really, but the last few months have been great.

Beryl Long We wouldn't be sitting here [being interviewed] if it wasn't for our daughter.

George Long No, she started all this, but she's enjoying the results.

Nunzio Mondia Excellent.

George Long Yeah. I got my license on my father's T model Ute and then they bought me a Ute in that year, and I had that for 12 months. Then they sold that and bought me a Tourer and that was in 1948. I had the Ute from 1947 to 48 then I had the Tourer and I still have it today, and I can still drive it.

George Long I am a foundation member, of the Veteran Car Club. Ampol Petroleum and The Weekend News I think it's called, organised a car rally. From that, the Car Club was formed. And I'm one of the few Life Members. I think there are possibly three, but there are two that I know for sure. I'm not sure about the third one.

Nunzio Mondia Did the current lockdown affect your regular social meetings?

George Long No, they don't have meetings now. They have very few rallies now.

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Beryl Long: Our son is chairman of the Model T section of the Veteran Car Club.

George Long: He has a 1910 Tourer and a 1926 utility that belonged to Beryl's father. It was a wreck, and he [fixed it].

Beryl Long: It's a credit to him. I'd love you to see a photo of it.

Nunzio Mondia You mentioned W.A. compared to other places in the world like America and France.

George Long I don't think we're so tightly packed together as they are. The French, the English or the British and the Americans, and even in our own country, South Australia and Victoria I think are the worst ones right now. I'll be glad when it's all over. I can't think of anything we can do to help it.

George Long We were working together in one little business, a pest control operator. I was a pest control operator and Beryl was in the office. One day she said to the senior girl, "Who's that singing?" "Yeah, that's George." "Well, that's shocking." It was, I can't sing.

Anyway, as time went on, Beryl came out and said, "Would you like to be my partner for my brother's wedding on Saturday?" I said, "No, I go out with my mates on Saturday." Then I walked back to doing what I was doing. I thought, you're a silly mug, I'll go back. So, I went back and said, "Yes, I would like to go." And I did, and we've been together since. [Laughter]

Beryl Long That was only 1946.

2 Evan Kennea Executive Manager, Artistic Planning, WASO

Evan Kennea I'm Evan Kennea I'm the Executive Manager of Artistic Planning at the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. A very proud resident of North Perth. As I always like to call it, the land of great coffee, and Italians, lots of Italians. Although there are not as many as there used to be. But it's a fantastic place to be so close to the city, so close to so many things that you love to spend your time doing. And it's not a bad place to spend a COVID lockdown period.

The COVID period was for everybody, really unsettling, and unnerving. You didn't know how long the immediate shutdown or lockdown period was going to be. You didn't have the ability to make any forward plans. So suddenly being around your family back at the house, travelling very little, seeing family very little, taking lots of precautions. For me personally, I'd already fallen ill with something completely non-COVID related, thank goodness. But it made me especially wary of going out. It made me very wary of going to a supermarket, or anywhere there was a gathering of people. I was really aware that having been already a bit immunocompromised, the chance of having a bad experience if I contracted the COVID-19 virus made me really, really super cautious. And that was an unsettling period.

For us as a family, having just returned from a big holiday in Europe, where you're celebrating freedom and seeing so many sites and so many new experiences. To very quickly go to basically living in your bedroom, and your living room and taking your dog for a 15-minute walk every day was kind of a shocking experience.

For us, the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, we were like a lot of the arts companies around the country. We were one of the first to shut down and we'll still be one of the last things to get back to full normality. So, by the middle of March, the whole orchestra was shut down. The players were told no more concerts. Everybody was sent home to work.

There was an interesting period we had to figure out, like the rest of the world, how do you work from home. How do you set up your home office? What on earth is Zoom? No one had ever heard of Zoom before. And finding new ways to collaborate with your colleagues when you're physically distanced from them.

It was a challenging time. Kind of exciting. Kind of interesting. Ultimately really tiring because you realise that having face-to-face meetings, being around people, you can read the room so much. There are so many signals you pick up from people that aren't verbal, and suddenly when you're doing all these things through Zoom, all that information is lost. It was hard on the management; it was hard on the administration. It was especially hard on the orchestra. Orchestras live to make live music. They live to communicate to other people. Sure, it was interesting to suddenly do remote concerts. To get people to send in their little bits and pieces and individually mould them all together at the office and beam it out across the world.

As the restrictions were slowly eased, getting chamber music groups back together doing digital concerts, but nothing replaces that live concert experience, and that was a real challenge for everybody. How do we kind of keep our art form relevant? How do we keep communicating with people? How do we keep spreading that magic that we know happens in a concert hall when you can't access a concert hall?

When the first initial lockdown period started to ease, and it was a short lockdown period, I guess, compared to so many other places around Australia and around the world, so we're incredibly lucky. Even after that short period, it was a real sense of release, and you can get back out into the world. You can safely go and see your family. My mother also lives in North Perth, so to be able to go and visit her and not sit outside the boundary fence and talk to her inside the garden, but actually to sit next to her. To have your family around, to see friends, to be able to go to a cafe again and sit down with a cup of coffee. Just simple things.

Maybe the one silver lining out of a really horrible, horrible year is that you are reminded of what makes us human what makes us societal, of how you actually want to be with people. You want to enjoy things together. And for me, that was the real overwhelming feeling of coming out of that COVID period, that feeling of reconnecting and celebrating that all over again. You'd forgotten that it was special and that's what you actually needed in your life, and that was the really special thing for me.

The West Australian Symphony, of course, we shut the orchestra down straight away. We had one of the very first instances of a patron at an arts event anywhere in the country who then tested positive for COVID-19. That was a real shock to the system, and we had to put a lot of steps in place to deal with that and then very quickly, "The orchestra is going to shut down for a period."

As we discovered shutting down an orchestra is difficult. Rebooting an orchestra and coming back is actually much more difficult. So we started doing digital work, people being separated and sending in their individual contributions. And slowly get small groups of people back on the concert hall stage, physically distanced, but at least able to be in the same room and recording music. But that was string quartets, string octets and wind groups, small ensembles.

It wasn't really until July and August that we could start to bring bigger ensembles back to the concert hall stage, still with no audience. In fact, our first gathering was really just to put the band back together just to rehearse and play music. Just to connect the musicians back together to get them physically in the same room and get them listening to each other again. We started doing slightly larger ensembles until we could do a concert to thank all of the people who'd supported the orchestra over the shutdown period. So we were playing to five or six hundred people in the Perth Concert Hall. And it's only in the last two weeks, so now really October, that we've had the full orchestra back on the stage at the Perth Concert Hall. We're still playing to a much-reduced audience of about 600 people rather than 1,800 people.

There is a sense of thankfulness and gratefulness from the audience that they have their orchestra back in the hall playing for them. You can feel the excitement, you can feel a sense of energy and connection coming back together, and the audience is so grateful that they live in a part of the world where they can actually hear live orchestral music again. Of course, there are parts of the world where that's not going to be possible for maybe another year.

Now that we're looking forward and trying to plan for a post-COVID world or a contained COVID world or something. We are finding how difficult that is. There's a feeling that you're planning while standing on quicksand because you just don't know how the world's going to turn out, how it's going to change. If you're in Western Australia, will hard borders change quickly? Will it be some time in the middle of next year? Can you bring in international guests? When will the international border change, and particularly what's going to happen with our audience? Will they have the same appetite to come back to the hall as it's still a socially distanced orchestra in the hall? There's a feeling of people taking care of each other and protective measures in place to look after the audience's health.

When that returns to full audience capacity, will people still feel confident sitting so close to each other as they used to? That might take a period of time to come back.

There are so many uncertainties that you plan knowing that a percentage of your plans will probably fall over, but probably, possibly in ways that you don't expect. In your head, you have Plan B, Plan C and Plan D. You know it's going to be something that comes from left field, and you suddenly need a Plan Z and you won't know how to deal with that. And you will have to invent things all over again. It's a challenging time, but at least you've been through, you hope, the worst of it. You've planned accordingly, you've got some new skills, and you've got some new digital skills. You've found different ways of reaching out to people, different ways of bringing people together. So maybe the toolkits are stocked in a different way, but ultimately, when you're talking about a live music experience, it's about the art of communication and the art of listening, and that's all-communal listening and communal playing. For the foreseeable future, everything is a little uncertain and we just have to navigate the waters accordingly.

I guess if I have one hope of something positive that comes out of this terrible year, it's that people step back a little bit, and remember what's important. That it's about connection and it's about togetherness. It sounds really cliché and really trite, but from my personal experience, the sudden yanking away of that ability to enjoy the part of my job, which is the payoff for all the work you do behind the scenes. To go into a hall and hear a great orchestra with a great conductor playing some of the greatest musical pieces ever written.

To have that suddenly taken away and not be able to go to the theatre, or sit in a restaurant, and not to be with people, that was such a shocking experience. It really left you feeling kind of hollow and devoid. So I hope that we'll travel internationally a bit less. Although we, all of us, especially Australians, love to do that. But I hope that we start to look to each other again and to support each other and remember that people are the most important thing and how we relate to each other, how we care for each other. If that's what comes out of a really horrible year, that will be amazing.

3 Robert Hofmann Transcript

Robert Hofmann My name is Robert Hofmann. I've lived in the City of Vincent since 2004. So that's sixteen years in North Perth, which is a lovely area to be in, by the way. Very close to town, very close to everything that's wonderful about Perth.

I'm a singer and singing teacher. I sing opera, cabaret, music theatre and concerts as and when gigs come up, or I organise my own gigs. I also teach in my home studio in North Perth, and I teach at WAPPA.

The semi-lockdown of COVID, because I think in Perth, we've only ever had what we call semi-lockdown. We didn't go too severe, thank heavens like Melbourne did and is still doing, I believe. The immediate effect was that I did a lot of online teaching from my home in North Perth. Both high school teaching and one on one singing teaching, using Zoom and singing lessons at WAPPA. Again, one on one was conducted using Zoom. So, there's a lot more time at home, which was both good and bad. The good thing was that at your morning tea break, you made yourself a cup of coffee in your own kitchen and you had full control over catering, because it was your own house. Staying at home, meant watching a lot more Netflix, which wasn't a bad thing, sometimes.

This brings us to performing arts generally, as I'm in the performing arts. Things changed there. The smaller companies like Freeze Frame Opera were very well positioned to take advantage of changing the way they operate to reflect the new environment. They decided, they had this great idea, which was inspired by some YouTube videos of Italians in Italy serenading each other from their balconies. They decided to launch what they called street serenades. I did the very first one, which wasn't in Vincent. It was in South Perth, a pianist and two singers and we sang standard operatic arias and duets and music theatre. So, there were no rehearsals and the standard rates we were paid, made it quite a good gig to do.

We sang for about twenty-five minutes and it became so popular that they received bookings all over the metro area. I did several in the City of Vincent. Somebody would contact Freeze Frame Opera via their website and book a serenade for a modest fee and that got them two singers and a pianist doing operatic lollipops if you like, and some music theatre numbers for twenty-five minutes in the street, out the front of their home. The City of Vincent had quite a few.

There was one in my street. Ironically enough, I wasn't booked to perform that one because they wanted a tenor, and I'm a baritone. This particular guy who booked it wanted *Nessun Dorma*, that great aria, and it's not in my rep because I'm not a tenor. So, I walked 100 metres up the road and saw some of my good colleagues singing in the back of the truck. In that case, it was Jun Zhang and Naomi Johns, which was a great serenade to watch.

You get various sizes of audiences. For instance, in the City of Vincent, in Mount Lawley, near the Second Avenue IGA, they planned a gathering at the front of the house. So, with social distance, they had drinks and people were standing in the front yard of one of those lovely Highgate/Mount Lawley homes. They were all standing outside, and we were standing in the back of the truck.

Freeze Frame Opera bought a 1975 model Bedford Truck, a retro-looking truck that provides the perfect stage platform. We sang from the top of that stage. This puts us up quite high. So, people had no problem seeing us and indeed hearing us because during lockdown there was less traffic around and less noise generally. We didn't use amplification. We used an electric piano, which had speakers in it, which was enough, and we just used the natural voice. The advantage of that is no mucking around with soundchecks, as we know they can take forever. We didn't need to have a sound guy. We had a lighting guy because it was night-time, and we needed some lighting. Robbie, who's the designer for many Freeze Frame Opera productions, did a great job of lighting us up and making us look interesting, plugging into the power of the home with an extension cord, which also powered the electric piano.

The other advantage of not having amplification is you are less likely to get noise complaints from neighbours if you're just using natural acoustics. The operatic voice travels quite well over, I would say 20 metres, and it's directional. As long as they're in the right zone, they could hear very well.

It was an interesting learning experience as a singer. Singing outside is not something you would usually do without amplification. The feedback you got was completely different when singing in a room. It was similar, but not the same as singing in a room like this. It's hard to understand, you heard more of yourself than you did in a small room. It is the sense of freedom, singing outside without amping. The audience was very appreciative and very happy to be seeing live performing arts. It was very, very popular. At some stage, the Freeze Frame Opera had about 10 or 11 performances booked per day. They would use the same pianist, Tommaso Pollio, Tommaso grew up in the Town of Vincent I know that. He grew up in Menora, but he now lives in Dianella. His mother and father still live in Menora. He had 11 bookings per day sometimes. Different teams of singers, because as a singer, you can't really sing 11 gigs at half an hour each, you'd have no voice left, so they rotated the singers.

So, ironically enough, I was doing more singing during some of the lockdown periods than at other times. Because you had small gigs popping up, sometimes three a night or one in the late afternoon, and three at night. You had a short break between each one when you drove to the next booking. The other thing, talking about technology, is that you just got given an address. You put it into your Apple Maps or Google Maps on your phone and just drive there. Had this been pre-automatic maps and sat. nav. technology, it would have been a complete pain. You would have had to get out of your UBD to find the address. It would have taken quite some time, and you had to stop to make sure you are going the right way. But now you just put the address in and go. Totally deluxe. They quietened down a little bit and I'm doing some again this weekend. Yes, because even though the lockdown finished, they are so popular they're continuing with them.

A very positive, permanent change is that people are more aware of hygiene. Especially when it comes to cold and flu virus transmission. As a singer, this is vital. My singing students are much more vigilant about cancelling when they have a sniffle, which is fantastic. This year I haven't had a cold or the flu yet, touch wood, there's wood everywhere here [Nunzio's studio]. So that's one good thing, people will have a heightened awareness of how easily cold and flu transmits.

In the initial phase of lockdown, I had some gigs on the horizon. A lot of singers get these gigs during a quiet period, but you want to keep your skills up. You accept some either low-fee-paying or no-fee-paying gigs for charities or a friend's birthday. They can sometimes turn out to be just a little bit of a pain. I made a joke with Tommaso, that a few of these gigs I had lined up in March and April had to be cancelled due to COVID. It was actually very pleasing, that some non-paying gigs got cancelled. So that was one of the silver linings of COVID-19.

Nunzio Mondia So which non-paying gigs did you cancel? [Laughter]

Rob Hoffman No, it wouldn't be appropriate to tell you which or what. I don't think we need that in the archives. [Laughter].

Hope for the future generation of... We're talking about performers generally and singers like me. YouTube might be wonderful, you can watch on YouTube, but there's nothing like seeing a performer sing or play live. There's nothing like it and we're blessed in the City of Vincent to have two fantastic venues. We've got the Ellington, and right here at CentreStage Recording Studios, which I believe, can be used both as a live venue and a TV or sound recording studio. In a way, it's perfectly positioned to capture both ends of the post-COVID market. That is videos on YouTube and other social media, as well as for small, intimate live performances.

And intimate is where we're going because if you're going to an indoor venue seating thousands and thousands, you're more at risk of catching something from potential pandemics in the future. You could argue that boutique venues that only fit a small number of people could be the way of the future. I said that already, way before COVID happened.

The reason things like fringe festivals around the world are so huge is, people are craving intimacy in performance. They're seeing people close up. You can go and see your favourite rock star in an arena with 30,000 people. Some of them are that big. It's insane. Yet you're not getting an intimate experience with the performer. You're seeing them from a long, long way away and on a TV screen. So, it's almost like watching them on YouTube or watching them on the telly. You do get the frisson of live experience, but it's not the same as small bespoke venues up close and personal.

YouTube is a wonderful medium to see singers performing, but as a singer myself, I didn't upload anything new during COVID-19. I could have done it. I could have sung an aria or a song and uploaded it. Some people were uploading songs in one take, which is all very well. And sometimes it was great, but the problem is, you put the name of the song or Aria in YouTube, and when people watch it on their feed, it says, up next, Pavarotti singing the same song. I mean, who the hell wants to be compared to Pavarotti singing something, especially if you're a tenor? That's just an example.

It's unfair to compare a one-take recording with the amazingness of Pavarotti. The famous singer that comes up on YouTube in competition with your posting, is probably going to be a studio recording. Many takes, many edits, many, many God knows what else in post-production, whereas yours wasn't. Even if it was a live recording, chances are it's from a concert that was rehearsed for weeks and weeks or an opera production that was performed for 10 nights, and they often pick and choose the best night.

So the point I'm making is it's really courageous uploading things online because you're compared with the absolute best in the world. Sometimes that comparison can be very good. Other times, it's just a bit too much for the artist to cope with, in my personal opinion. By the way, Pavarotti was the last of the three tenors to be performing regularly, Domingo does, but he's a baritone now.

Pavarotti's last performance tour occurred in the City of Vincent, just up the road in what used to be called Perth Oval, which is now called NIB Stadium. That's right, I didn't attend that because I was in the wrong place at the right time. I heard that he was really struggling to keep up with things and had to sit down for most of the concert.

The good news story is that [laughter], I did a cabaret show called What the Fandango with piano accordionist Kathy Travers. At The Ellington, at the beginning of 2019 as part of Fringe World that year, that led to some regional touring with Circuit West, which is the state government body that helps arts tours. I had one booked in Harvey in May this year, and sadly, that was cancelled. The good news is they've rescheduled it for the 6th of March next year. So, What the Fandango, is going down to Harvey and also in Thornlie the night before, of all places.

By the way, if you're wondering about What the Fandango is, I dress up as several different characters fully costumed, and people seem to find it funny because it's meant to be a comedy. They seem to laugh. I took it to New York last year and took another show to Edinburgh a few years ago. That's why I was so passionate about up close and personal art forms, cabaret is an example of that. It's an advantage to be living in Perth, being one of the most isolated capital cities in the world. Normally, it's a nuisance having to go so far to get to another major centre, but now it's an advantage. We have the advantages of a big city without the disadvantages of overcrowding and more likely for a virus to be spread. Also, the sheer isolation makes it easy to lock the borders off.