

ART and MUSIC in TASMANIAN CAVES

Cathie Plowman

For more than 20 years there has been an artist-in-residence program in Tasmanian national parks and reserves, provided by a partnership between Arts Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service. Residencies range between four and eight weeks and offer opportunities for artists to immerse themselves within the environment, to experiment and develop new ideas. The provision of on-site accommodation enables artists to live within the reserve for extended periods of time away from their usual environments.

Over the past 20 years artists participating in the program have worked with varied media that have included writing, painting, sound, textile and fibre. To see more, have a look at these websites:

<https://tasmanianartsguide.com.au/online-exhibition/arts-in-parks>

<http://www.arts.tas.gov.au/funding/programs/residencies>

In 2016-17 two artists had residencies, one at Hastings Caves and the other at Mole Creek Caves.

Hobart artist Janelle Mendham has felt drawn back to Hastings Caves since a visit there with her parents 20 years ago. Her work at Hastings Caves was entwined with the theme 'Return to Earth' and Janelle likens entering a cave to entering the body of the Earth.

Janelle has developed three tranches of work in response to her experiences at Hastings Caves.

An exhibition called *Inner Topographies*, which was an installation of drawings, visual diaries and a book of short stories written in response to the cave. The drawings were done by impregnating the paper with solution-based water, Janelle's response to the development of the cave by water seeping into the rock. This exhibition was shown at the Moonah Arts Centre in Hobart in late 2016. A 'mini-exhibition' was also prepared for the staff at Hastings Caves so that they could see what Janelle was developing from the information and stories that staff were contributing. Janelle is very grateful for the time and input the staff gave her, taking her to nearby caves and sharing their stories.

Darkness and aloneness were integral to a work called *Dark Cave* which was a quiet, performance reading event in Newdegate Cave. Janelle describes *Dark Cave* as 'one of the most powerful and beautiful artworks that I've made'.

The third event is an exhibition due to open on 5 April 2018 at the Rosny Gallery, in Hobart. This is called *The Shape of Space* and is a response to the empty space of the cave.

As part of the exhibition, Janelle is endeavouring to communicate the immense age of the rock - 650 million years. Dolomite rock formed aeons ago when a single-celled organism was the only life on Earth. How do you comprehend and convey that amount of time? Janelle is developing a 7.5 metre 'map' to try. Hobart geomorphologist and ACKMA member Chris Sharples is helping Janelle with the story of the Hastings dolomite.

Emily Sheppard was drawn to caves as part of her journey playing violin and viola and singing in resonate spaces. This has included playing in Tasmanian locations that include the disused silos on Maria Island, the Table Cape Lighthouse, the Alexander Battery at Sandy Bay and the Hobart Rivulet tunnels.

A part-time player with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Emily was successful in obtaining residencies at both Hastings Caves and Mole Creek Caves in 2017.

At Mole Creek, Emily had a week in July, followed by another in September and spent three hours each day in Marakoopa Cave playing music during two cave tours and, for 1.5 hours between these tours, alone in the cave with its silence, working with the acoustics of the cave and developing music, using viola, violin and voice. She strives to create a single, homogenous sound between her voice and instrument, the cave acoustic assisting in the blend.

Alone in the house at King Solomons Cave at night, sometimes as snow fell outside, Emily experimented with her ideas, practiced and recorded her pieces. She says that she is grateful for the time that she spent with the cave guides, learning about the cave from them and incorporating this into her music.

While the Mole Creek residency was as a solo musician, the Hastings Caves residency was with musician Anne Norman from Hobart. Anne plays a shakuhachi, which is a traditional Japanese flute, made from bamboo. The duo shared a two-week residency in September 2017, which culminated in a performance in Newdegate Cave. The one-hour performance featured music inspired by caves and was attended by 100 people. Titles of pieces included *Moonmilk*, *Cave Guides* and *Memory Places*; the latter piece honouring the Indigenous people of the Hastings Caves area.

Looking back on her residencies, Emily feels that four weeks was somewhat ambitious to write, compose, notate, practise and develop a performance, but that there is a lot more scope for developing music in caves and sharing this with the wider community. She continues to collaborate with Anne Norman and other musicians developing sound in resonate spaces. Emily is part-way through an environmental science degree.

While on tour with a chamber music group in central Queensland earlier in the year, Emily linked up with long-time ACKMA member Dianne Vavryn who kindly took her to Chandelier Cave near Rockhampton where she enjoyed playing her instruments.

In preparing this article, I have felt humbled talking to both Janelle and Emily and trying to understand more about their work. As cave managers and advocates we have barely scratched the surface in reaching out for new ways in which to link the community with caves. The sold-out performance in Newdegate Caves says that the public is more than keen.

My thanks to Beth Russell at Hastings Caves, artist Janelle Mendham, musician Emily Sheppard and Wendy Morrow at Arts Tasmania for their kind assistance with this article.