

Big event means big money for Sunraysia



JOHN Arnold couldn't be happier. The crowds have been as big as ever, and well behaved, events have been on time, the weather's been great, and the artists are already talking about next year.

The Sunraysia Country Music Festival has celebrated its 21st year in style, but according to John, the Mildura event came of age many years ago.

"Last year the estimate was that it was worth just over \$7 million to the local economy, and predictions are that this year will be the same," he said.

John, the festival's chief organiser as well as being the Mayor of Mildura, said the city had welcomed crowds of up to 12,000 for the festival in recent years.

It's a long way behind Tamworth

(around 40,000) and the Gympie Muster (25,000), but Mildura has the most unique event, providing thousands of hours of free entertainment from scores of independent artists at 24 venues across the district, day and night.

They range from the Poet's breakfast at the Setts to the well supported talent quest, to the glamour night - the Southern Stars Australian In-

dependent Country Music awards tomorrow night.

Broadcast live, it will go to 30 commercial radio stations around Australia, along with community radio nationwide via a satellite hook-up.

John said all district venues had reported good crowds again this year, with probably the biggest being up to 2000 people at the Henderson Park concerts.

Some shining stars from this year's stunning festival

CRAIG GILES

BASED in Finley, NSW, Craig spends most of his time on the road appearing at festivals and clubs Australia wide, and the versatile entertainer is a huge crowd favourite.

He has won numerous awards and accolades, and released 11 successful albums including the most recent release 'Kick It'. In September, 2005, Crain won the Open Contemporary Section of the 2005 Tasmania & New Zealand Songwriters Contest with 'A Million Beerdrops' and 'Riding That White Line'. He has released three successful singles from the album - 'Who Said Girls Don't Drive', 'Riding That White Line' and his latest single 'A Million beer Drops'.

TOM CURTAIN

TOM Curtain is a 'Mr Versatile', juggling horse-breaking and country music careers. He is enjoying the enormous success of his debut album 'Smack Bang' which grabbed two Golden Guitar nominations and spawned four hit singles.

Tom teamed up with multi Golden-guitar winning producer and writer Garth Porter, and was back last November with his new album 'Heatwave'.

The first two singles 'Born Out Here' and 'Chew Like Hell' continued Tom's amazing chart success, and the latest single 'Wearing Out Leather' looks certain to follow suit.

NELLIE DONOVAN

THERE'S something about Nellie Donovan that draws people in the moment they hear her sing. Her rich, soulful voice delivers songs with conviction and emotion.

People in her audience embark on a journey with a songwriter not afraid to expose

her life openly and honestly. Last year was a hugely successful year for Nellie with the release of her album 'Steppin' Out, a finalist in the MusicOz Awards, and two successful radio singles 'Sing Me An Angel' and 'Cruisin'.

DONNA BOYD

LAST year, award-winning international artist Donna Boyd started a new phase of her career. The first single released 'A Good Day' hit Number 5 in the Country Top 30, while her first music video clip climbed into the Country Music Channel Top 30.

Her stunning new album 'Luckiest Girl Alive' has excited fans and industry all over Australia since its official launch in Tamworth earlier this year.

ANGELA HAYDEN

ANGELA began her career at the age of 11, and in less than three years had been awarded more than 100 trophies and awards.

By the time she was 18, her CD and Cassette sales had exceeded 22,000 from three albums, and she had earned the title, "the yodelling sweetheart".

Her 1999 self-titled album attracted excellent reviews and great reaction from her legions of fans.

KELLY HOPE

KELLY Hope is a 22-year old singer-songwriter about to take the country music world by storm.

Born in Albury, Kelly has been performing and writing her own songs since the age of 14. Most recently, she has released her debut single 'Heartbreak Road' late in 2006. She graduated from Tamworth College of Country Music in January, 2007, but her achievements as singer-songwriter began

many years before.

After travelling the Australian Country Music circuit, supporting such artists as Troy Cassar-Daley and Lee Kernaghan, Kelly recorded her first tracks 'Summer Train,' in 2003.

In January, 2005, Kelly was a top 20 finalist in the Toyota Starmaker competition in Tamworth, and on stage she's been the main attraction of both International and Australian crowds ever since.

CASEY WATT

CASEY has built a strong following around the Queensland club circuit, winning best female vocal act for three consecutive years. She has had a wealth of experience in live performance in impressively diverse genres of music, but her country roots still shine through, giving her a unique vocal style. Casey is a two time Star Maker Grand-finalist and multi-award winning female vocalist.

Her first single 'I Don't Want To Work This Hard' reached Number 6 on the Country Tracks Top 30, and the second single 'If I Needed You,' a Tamworth winner this year, was another Top 10 chart hit.

TOM MAXWELL

TOM has earned his reputation as one of Australia's finest bush balladeers.

He won the Banjo Paterson Songwriters Award in 1994, made the finals of Star Maker in 1995, won the Gordon Parsons Memorial Award for Australian Bush Balladeer in 1996 and released his debut album 'New Wave Of The Bush' (with five self-penned tracks) in 1997.

His album Rodeo Wind received tremen-

dous reaction with the successful chart song 'Bandy The Rodeo Clown', he was a finalist in the 2004 Golden Guitars with 'Gidgee After Rain', and won best male vocal at the Stan Coster Memorial Bush Ballad Awards. His new album 'Sometimes' was released in 2005.

SALLY-ANNE WHITTEN

A BORN singer/songwriter, Sally-Anne comes from a musical family. From the age of 14, she has been a regular face in backing bands, studio sessions and concerts, and been involved in many leading bands.

Her style is said to be best described as a good mixture of country and soul.

Her musical talent, both as a singer and as a guitar player, make her an outstanding, dedicated and passionate musician.

DON COSTA

ONE of the true legends of Mildura country music. Started out with family group Shadow Rock, and now recognised as one of Australia's top solo performers in his own right - to the stage where he has moved from Robinvale to Queensland to make the best of limited opportunities.

Don has released three new CD's in recent months, and as well as performing at Mildura, hosted several shows to capacity crowds at various venues around the district. His message to Mildura fans: "I'll be back."



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