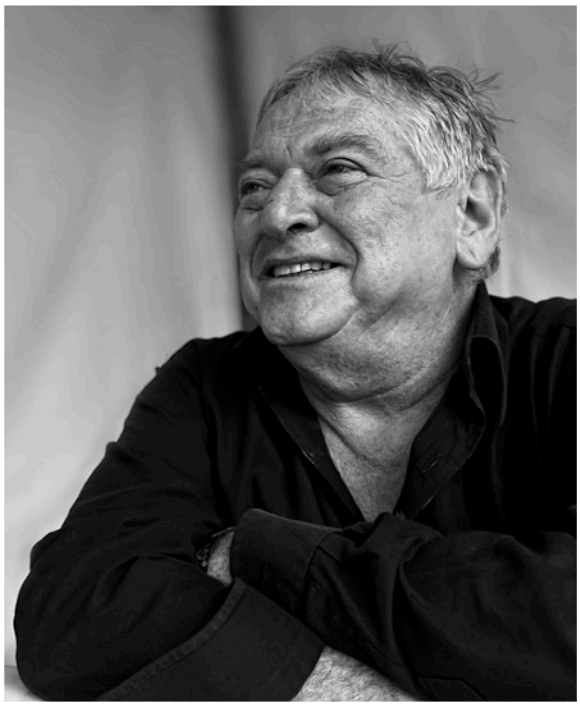
Bill Hauritz

ONE of Australia's most cherished festival visionaries, Bill Hauritz, has been remembered by close friend and Maleny artist, Linsey Pollak, as a man whose dreams reshaped the cultural life of a nation.



Woodfordia announced Mr Hauritz's passing earlier this week, saying he left behind a legacy that reshaped the nation's festival landscape and inspired generations of artists and audiences.

Mr Pollak said the loss would be deeply felt across the arts community but that Mr Hauritz's vision would continue to shape Australian culture for generations.

"Thank you for your extraordinary vision and the ability to bring people together to collectively bring that vision to life," Mr Pollak said.

"You had the ability to glance into a rear vision mirror and from the brief glimpse of a hidden valley in that mirror begin a journey that is now shared by thousands and thousands of people and has changed the cultural landscape of Australia.

"Yes Bill, you are still with us, with your dreams becoming our dreams. You have not gone. That is the beauty of dreams that are for the common good, they have a habit of surviving. They can even outlive a 500 Year Plan by taking on the shape and flavour of the many people who dream those dreams individually and collectively.

"And those dreams already are more than dreams, they become part of the world around us: a tree, 5,000 trees, 50,000 trees, a lake. But more than that, it's the intangible links between us that are created which help us move forward. Thanks Bill."

Mr Hauritz, a former schoolteacher with a deep love of folk music, built Woodford from a small hinterland gathering into a nationally significant celebration of music, ideas and community. What began as the Maleny Folk Festival in 1987 grew into Woodfordia, a 500-acre cultural parkland visited by more than 120,000 people each year.

He believed culture could bind communities, spark conversations and model a more hopeful way of living. Under his leadership, Woodford became known not

only for its eclectic programming but also for its environmental ethos, respect for Indigenous culture and emphasis on intergenerational learning. His “500-Year Plan” for Woodfordia, a long-term blueprint for cultural and environmental stewardship, reflected his belief in planting ideas and trees whose benefits he would never see.

Arts Minister Tony Burke said Mr Hauritz was “loved” across the arts world and regarded as a singular figure in Australian cultural life.

“Bob Hawke once told me I would never meet a better Australian than Bill Hauritz,” he said.

“He created not just a festival but an example of how people could live with less conflict and more care. The arts in Australia is forever enriched by his life.”

Woodfordia co-founder and managing director Amanda Jackes said Mr Hauritz’s optimism and sense of possibility shaped everything the organisation became. “Bill didn’t just create a festival, he created a world,” she said. “He taught us how to build something beautiful that lasts, not just in memory, but in the land and in each other.”

Jamie McKew OAM, founder of the Port Fairy Folk Festival and a close friend, said Mr Hauritz was a “rare kind of visionary”. “He created a wonderland in the hills of Queensland, a place where magic feels possible,” he said. “When community embraces culture, humanity may flourish beyond our dreams.”

International recognition came last year when Woodfordia received a UNESCO award for its contribution to intangible cultural heritage, which was a tribute to Mr Hauritz’s lifelong commitment to fostering living traditions through community and creativity.

Mr Hauritz received numerous honours, including Queensland Great, the Order of Australia (AM) and a Smithsonian Fellowship. Yet those close to him say he remained grounded, with a dry humour and an unwavering belief in people.

Woodfordia’s leadership group said his legacy, cultural, environmental and deeply human, remains woven into the landscape he imagined, shaped and loved.

Bill is deeply mourned by his wife Ingrid, sons Tom and Jack, daughter-in-law Mel and grandchildren Elke and Stellan, alongside the extended Woodfordia family of organisers, artists, volunteers and festivalgoers whose lives he helped shape. He was so loved.

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