

# Steve McLeish

Steve McLeish - Hinterland Times Feb 2022



## A musical full circle

PART 2

In Maleny circles, Steve McLeish is known as a multi-skilled musician and event organiser extraordinaire, but delve a little deeper and there is much more to his story.



By GAY  
LIDDINGTON

**S**ydney born Steve McLeish entered the world with music

and a fighting spirit in his blood. He attributes his achievements to the many teachers who lit the way. After a family business venture failed, Steve left Sydney and landed at the newly established Crystal Waters Eco Village in 1988.

"I was a smooth-skinned city man with soft hands. My first job was with a builder who had 52 holes dug for a house. They were too small, so I had to square off the holes with a crowbar in the middle of winter. No gloves—it wrecked my hands. I swung a hammer on 22 of the houses at Crystal Waters and the village community hall."



In the mid-'90s, music drew Steve back to itself. He became part of a covers band, then later, formed a duo with Gary Jones. The two had previously worked together as volunteer organisers at a fundraising event, *Circus of the Senses* for the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre. Steve's talent as an event organiser developed.

"I ran a festival called *Rhythm of Life* in Green Park, Conondale. Maleny local, Steve Langton, told me he'd just made an instrument—it was his first thongophone, a percussive instrument made from PVC pipes that produces the sound when struck with a rubber clapper.

"Gary and I agreed we'd discovered a rough diamond in Steve, one who hadn't played much music but made these unique instruments. Steve Langton joined us and came up with the name *Hubbub*. Jacinta Foale then became part of the team and we hit the performance road.

"After a few years, instrument making took precedence and *Hubbub* consisted of the two Steves. We had amazing adventures, like building S.S. Synge, a fire organ, on a river barge under Brisbane's Story Bridge for the Centenary of Federation event.

"Another *Hubbub* project was the 50-foot 'Trash Dragon'. Inside was 'Sprocket', a musical rickshaw. The kids at the festival, literally, 'got eaten' and came through the belly where we were playing the Sprocket and exited out the other end, through the tail.

"A highlight for the 'Trash Dragon' was at Woodford Folk Festival, New Year's Eve 2000. We performed for a global simulcast and were the first shown to an audience of millions."

Over the years, Steve McLeish immersed himself in understanding rhythm and movement, through the art of body percussion.

He combined that with the Gurdjieff movements—multiple rhythms, self-observation, and left-right brain integration, to originate a team-building program, *Thinking Rhythm*, which he taught to school teachers, who passed it on to their students.

"I was then asked to work with a global network of facilitators. My first job was in Hong Kong. It was a raging success—disarming and mind opening. I worked with groups of up to 150 people. We took *Thinking Rhythm* to Taipei and Singapore."

In the meantime, Gary Jones drifted away from *Hubbub* music and Steve McLeish and Steve Langton took their craft to Korea and the central Australian desert.

"We were grinding and making instruments all day, as Steve still does. We worked with six schools in Korea—



◀ Barung Landcare President Eric Anderson and Event Manager Steve McLeish  
– Maleny Wood Expo 2013 - image Steve Swayne

created a performance and made installations for each school.

“On our return, Dr Yang Hee-Q from the Korean Gandhi School asked to bring his students to Australia to learn from us. I took on that project and the Maleny Gandhi School evolved.

“The Maleny community provided the Year 11 students with homestay accommodation. I employed performing arts people and developed the ‘learning English through performing arts’ course. It was highly successful—four groups a year, 40 students at a time. We did that for eight years.”

After the Gandhi School project ended in 2010, McLeish’s reputation as festival coordinator preceded him.

“I was working for Barung Landcare and became involved with the Maleny Wood Expo. This would be my 15th year with them, first as assistant coordinator, then coordinator.

“Between 2008—2011, I site managed the Caloundra Music Festival, and the emergency response team at the Woodford Folk Festival, and the Dreaming Festival.

“Add The Real Food Festival, World Environment Day, plus jobs in Brisbane and Sydney. I was doing about seven festivals a year. In 2010, I lost grip and was diagnosed as having a breakdown.

“In recovery, I identified the Maleny Wood Expo as being the most important to me, so I stuck with that one and then in 2012 managed the opening of the Maleny Community Centre.”

February 2021 marked five years since the closure of Maleny’s iconic UpFront Club. Steve had been living in Landsborough and on his return, noticed that a sense of grief still permeated the community.



“The artists had no say, and young people didn’t have a place to incubate. While having coffee with a couple of artists, an idea hatched. So, I started Saturday morning artists’ coffee catchup with around 40 people attending.

“Brainstorming, we came up with the FrontUp name. I formulated a plan, and Monday nights FrontUp in Maleny Lane came to life.”

Steve McLeish, honoured as winner of the 2014 Sunshine Coast Council Australia Day Award, Creative Section, seems single-minded in his determination to support the arts in the community.

Whether teaching his students saxophone, clarinet, or body percussion, at the helm directing events, or facilitating Monday night’s FrontUp gigs at Maleny Lane, Steve McLeish is held in high esteem by his peers.

Steve expresses his passion for connecting young people to community elders: “My main drive right now is around the fact that we are enriched by all these old masters in the arts, and to create a space and the



Hubbub interactive musical playground at Rockhampton Botanical Gardens - 2000



Tesch Park pod instrument made by Steven Langton and Steve McLeish with a Work for the Dole team - 2002



opportunity to put those masters with young people would be awesome.

"For me, the community is so important. It's not about money, I possess a car and some musical instruments, but I do have what's important, a loving community." 🌍

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Article by Gay Liddington

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