



**MEDIA RELEASE – 11 MARCH 2025**

**OUR FESTIVAL IS STILL STANDING - BUT WE'RE WORN OUT!**

After three years growing a new festival in regional Victoria, the team of cheerful baby boomers who put their lives on hold to create a weekend of post Covid togetherness in the small town of Creswick (pop. 3200) are proud and a tiny bit embarrassed about what they've created: CresFest 2025 will double the town's population over the first weekend in April, with over 300 performers, including bands, soloists, circus acts, magicians and community choirs, filling the streets of this tiny town between Ballarat and Daylesford.

"Manageability," says Judy Turner, fiddler, fund-raiser and workaholic, "that was our watchword in year one. We laugh at that now, but then we told ourselves, we'll keep it simple, we'll put concerts in all the lovely buildings in our town."

Far from being simple, CresFest presents concerts for ticket holders taking place in halls right across Creswick, and presents a huge outdoor program, running from early Saturday to dusk Sunday. Parents of kids under 12 will be richly rewarded again, with tickets for the littlies free, and the wonderful KidZone providing a place to gather, sing, watch, draw, make, and even try heritage games like Jacks, Skipping and Elastics with the Pop-Up Play group from Melbourne.

Despite (or maybe because of) all this creativity and colour, the organisers are feeling a bit harried as they get close to opening night on Friday 4 April. The sheer scale of the endeavour, and the number of moving parts, has some of the organisers feeling beat. Talking three weeks out from CresFest 2025, Turner has a look of quiet resignation about her. Winning two Folk Alliance Awards in two years was a great boost to the volunteers who built CresFest, but presenting live music in up to 18 venues at a time, she says, can be a bit of a nightmare.

"I don't know where we went wrong," she says, "but everything we did became complicated, really quickly! We were determined not to bring marquees to town, not to compete with the big guys, not to have to wrestle with security, lights, and the dreaded world of POPE permissions. We thought people would love to see the inside of our beautiful heritage buildings, like the old Courthouse, the Havilah Masonic Lodge, and our dear old Town Hall."

A sold-out festival in 2024 might have proved them right, but one of the hardest things about this small town event, jokes Mark Myers, President of CresFest Inc, and convenor of the Creswick Acoustic and Folk Music Club, is finding out not where all the bodies are buried, but where the keys are kept! All those venues means a lot of committees and a heck of a lot of keys.

The challenges of working across a whole community also deliver huge benefits, with around 180 locals volunteering to work on set up, door duty or hosting artists. This massive volunteer program is itself managed by volunteers, who bring a sense of community to everything they do. Then the economic benefits, says Myers who does the number crunching, stack up too. “We calculate we’ve brought value of over \$1m in new money to town each year,” says Myers, “on top of the social capital we’re building among the community. Local business owners like Brendan Smith, of the American Hotel (pictured) stock up well in advance, and now know to get in the extra staff for the first weekend of April.

“We were surprised how successful it was for us, right out of the gate,” says Smith, “every year, we get slammed! Year Two we were The Pub With No Beer, and had to shut early, which is what every publican dreams of. It’s a great vibe and a really friendly crowd, and we love it when the folkies come to town - we love that they bring crowds here who just want to sing, or play, and fill our front bar with joy.”

Stella Savy, Ballarat musician and noted choir leader, is one of the graduates of “the school of Sovereign Hill.” She’s put together the artistic program two years running, and in 2026 takes over as Director. Savvy’s choir Sweet Monas will be taking the lead in the CresFestival Choir, with a chance for all ticket holders to join the fun, singing with some of the festival’s top performers at the finale concert.

“We’ve got world renowned performers like Neil Murray, Joe Geia, Grace Barbe (from Australia) and Chris Stout, Catriona McKay and Natty Dolaiasi (from overseas) playing to audiences as small as 50 and no bigger than 200. We’ve got the funkier bar in all of central Victoria (Leaver’s Hotel) pumping with music from Friday afternoon through to Sunday night, almost without cease. You can see old rockers like Sally Ford, The Dead Salesmen Duo and the inimitable Azo Bell (from QLD) in a bar that transports you to London or Berlin.”

Savvy says CresFest was founded to give a high-end live music experience to people in intimate surroundings, and has delivered on that mission “in spades.”

President Mark Myers says he takes his hat off to the partnerships team who have worked tirelessly to build relationships across town with community groups and businesses, large and small.

“We’ve had great support from Creswick icons in the RACV Goldfields Resort at one end, and the Creswick Woollen Mills at the other, and our Community Bank has been our very generous partner since the beginning, now our Principal Partner. All over town, pubs, clubs and community groups are opening their doors, and their hearts, to welcome people and show them our town.”

Hepburn Shire has been supportive, too, voting CresFest an ‘icon’ event in the shire after only two years. Confident they have nailed the formula, organisers are expecting another sold out CresFest this April.

“We’re relieved that, while getting the permits we need is never simple, we are not going to get hit with the permit problems that other festivals have faced,” says Turner.

Talking about the ill-fated Exotica festival (outside of Donald) Turner offers a salute to the organisers.

“You work all year, for no or very little pay, to bring a few days of joy to people's lives, and something like lack of a permit can wipe out all that effort, in one fell swoop. Tough on them, and tough on Donald.

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## **IMAGES**

[Best of CresFest 2022-24](#)  
[CresFest 2025 Selected Artists](#)

## **LINKS: CRESFEST - 4-6 APRIL 2025**

[cresfest.com.au/artists](http://cresfest.com.au/artists)  
[cresfet.com.au/program](http://cresfet.com.au/program)  
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