

to comfortably fall into place. I went to certain lengths to explain the story of the song and we talked about the mood of the story. This is evident in songs like 'Augathella Station', which has a drover's 'on the track' feel about the pace." Adding jazzman James Greening's blistering trombone, he says, created even more mood. "I definitely set out to breathe new life into many old chestnuts like 'Click Go The Shears' and 'Black Velvet Band'. I have always looked to take the music into contemporary settings that are sympathetic with the story and the times – fresh sounding but also saluting the tradition. I have worked with some of Australia's greatest interpreters of bush music and every stage has been a discovery."

Some tunes are recycled several times over, but with a different slant. "Folk music thrives on those devilish tunes and we worked to try and make songs using similar or the same tunes sound different. A good example is the never-before-recorded convict broadside 'William Donnelly', which I set to one of the most popular of all tunes, which you will recognise as the same tune as 'Van Dieman's Land'. However, we gave it a very up-tempo mood in line with its storyline – it's an unusual convict song in that it has a happy ending! Old time singers put tunes like 'Bow Wow Wow' to several songs, and if it was good enough for them it's still good enough for me. Did I ever consider writing new tunes to existing bush songs that have tunes? Never! To me that would be interfering with the tradition and lessen the integrity of these old songs."

Although this self-described "storytelling historian who sings" has performed the majority of the songs on the box set around the traps for decades, he says he adopted a fresh approach when it came to recording the new sets. "I wanted to challenge myself. I even used character voices such as on 'The Dodger' or 'Judges And Old Bailey'. I felt they needed a cockney type style to enforce the story. Other songs I knew in my head, but had never sung them out loud – well, not to anyone else. I recorded many songs, like 'When Dally Kicked The Goal', straight off the page. Once again, I gave the musicians the tune and mood and we created the song. There are many songs in the set that didn't have tunes – songs that appeared in print, especially broadsides, that I had to put to music. I believe I have a particular skill to fashion traditional tunes for these songs."

The selection process for *Folk Songs And Bush Verse* would have engendered countless hours of rumination, let alone the recording. Fahey decided to develop ten categories and then selected appropriate songs that would help tell the chosen subject's story. "I think like a folklorist – I am always putting songs into categories

so I can explain their stories whenever I perform." He says in many ways the CDs are a potted history of Australia with musical signposts. "I wanted them 'bite sized' because in this 21st century information age we need to package just about everything. My aim in all this has been to provide a resource for future Australians so they can identify their cultural signposts. It is inevitable we are moving towards a 'global culture' and I see my job as reminding Australians of our unique culture, how the pioneering nineteenth century contributed to 'who we are'. I think the songs and bush verse can play an important role in this work."

Fahey considers himself inordinately blessed to roam this sunburnt land delivering Australian's oral history to a wide demographic. "I have been unbelievably fortunate to carve a position for myself as a performer and grateful to all the festivals, libraries, art galleries, museums and country arts groups who continue to value and support my music. I believe I am in a unique position as a folklore collector in as much as I am also a performer. This allows me to collect and develop and, eventually, reintroduce songs back to the communities that created them. I have often said I am a folklore recycling unit and if I have a 'mission' in life then it is the popularisation of Australia's folklore – both past and present. The passion has been to make our people feel more Australian by understanding where we have come from and folklore can certainly help in that direction."

This is Warren Fahey's 40th year of collecting and performing, and he swears he's never been busier. He's been on a Commonwealth Government trip to the Philippines, performed at the Cobargo, Blue Mountains and National folk festivals, recorded a live concert for Radio National with fellow veteran Martyn Wyndham-Read, conducted a week of concerts for NSW Senior's Week, and done two folklore courses and two concerts for the Art Gallery of NSW work. If that weren't enough, he's working on two new books – one of which will be a songbook containing 100 songs from the CD collection – and is continuing to collect and research folklore, keep his website updated ([www.warren-fahey.com](http://www.warren-fahey.com)) and prepare for forthcoming tours. "Oh yeah, I also have to practice the concertina and learn new songs," he says as a parting shot.

**Australia Folk Songs And Bush Verse, released on ABC Music, is available through Universal as a box set, as two separate volumes and as individual CDs. Each disc comes with its own comprehensive booklet researched and written by Warren Fahey, containing background notes for every song and poem (see right).**

## THE BOX SET



**Australia Folk Songs And Bush Verse Volume One: Convict Stain To Shearers Blades** features traditional ballads, songs and bush verse that explore the foundation stones of the Australian identity from its convict birth through to federation. The five CD box set, comprise:

- Disc 1: Rare Convict Ballads And Broadsides
- Disc 2: Bushrangers, Bolters And Other Wild Colonials
- Disc 3: Give Me A Hut In My Own Native Land
- Disc 4: Currency Lads And Lasses: Songs Of Australian Colonial Romance
- Disc 5: Songs Of Drovers, Shearers And Bullockies.



**Australia Folk Songs And Bush Verse Volume Two: Celebration Of A Nation** features traditional and popular songs celebrating Australia from the golden years of the late 19th century through to post World War II urban life. The five CD box set, comprise:

- Disc 1: Across The Seven Seas: The Australian Maritime Collection
- Disc 2: Lean Times And Mean Times On The Hungry Mile: Australia In The Great Depression
- Disc 3: Solidarity Forever: Australian Songs Of Struggle And Strife
- Disc 4: Australia's On The Wallaby: Songs Of Pomp And Circumstance
- Disc 5: Roll, Pitch, Whack And Boot: Australian Legendary Sporting Songs.