



Unearthed: A constellation of singing talent

The talent pool of student singers is so deep that no amount of Australian Idols would do it justice, according to one of the nation's most experienced voice trainers, Clarita Derwent.

Derwent, who has been coaching professional and amateur vocalists for decades, said secondary schools were especially bursting with budding talent just waiting to be encouraged and developed.

"It never ceases to amaze me just how many natural singers we have in our schools who could go on to a career in music if given half a chance," comments Derwent, who recently completed a nine week program of lessons involving 41 pupils at two Sydney high schools – **Chester Hill High and Auburn Girls High.**

The program called **CONverge**, now in its fourth year, is an initiative of **The Smith Family** and aims to help young people explore and nurture their musical creativity individually and collectively.

"Many of the students taking part in the singing lessons at Chester Hill and Auburn have wonderful voices, and are typical of what we encounter on a regular basis with such schemes," says Derwent, who worked on CONverge with two other contracted consultants – Gemma Turner and Maria De Marco - on behalf of the **Sydney Conservatorium of Music.**

"The natural talent is there in spades, and the challenge is giving the students the confidence to express it, and the tools to want to express it, for example, through teaching them stagecraft, team-building and the need for added discipline, commitment and focus to reach their potential.

"The other challenge is cutting through some fixed perceptions on their chances of utilizing their talent for performing in public...that they don't necessarily have to be a contestant on shows like Australian Idol to have what it takes to seriously pursue music.

"What is particularly delightful with the students is their enthusiasm for singing on their own and as part of an ensemble...they are very supportive of each other."

The 2009 CONverge, proudly supported by **Westpac**, will reach a crescendo on Thursday, 1 October when the students join with teachers to perform a multi-program concert at The Con before an audience of family, friends and fellow pupils.

Ten employees of Westpac, who volunteered their time to participate in singing workshops similar to those provided by Con tutors to the school students, will also perform, along with students of the Conservatorium High School.

"Music development, the discovery and the love of music is what The Con is all about. Working with The Smith Family to help these young people gain pleasure while building their creative experience, their confidence and meet their peers from diverse social-economic backgrounds is just terrific," commented the Dean and Principal of The Con, **Professor Kim Walker.**

"The concert at the end galvanizes these relationships into a miraculous episode no one will forget."

(Continued)





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The Executive Director of The Smith Family, **Dr Gul Ismir** said: “These students would never usually have the chance to access professionally-trained musical instructors, let alone perform in the esteemed Conservatorium, and it’s such a great opportunity for them to develop singing skills while building confidence and an appreciation of music.”

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WHAT: CONverge Concert

WHERE: Music Workshop, Sydney Conservatorium of Music

WHEN: Thursday, 1 October

TIME: 12.30PM

