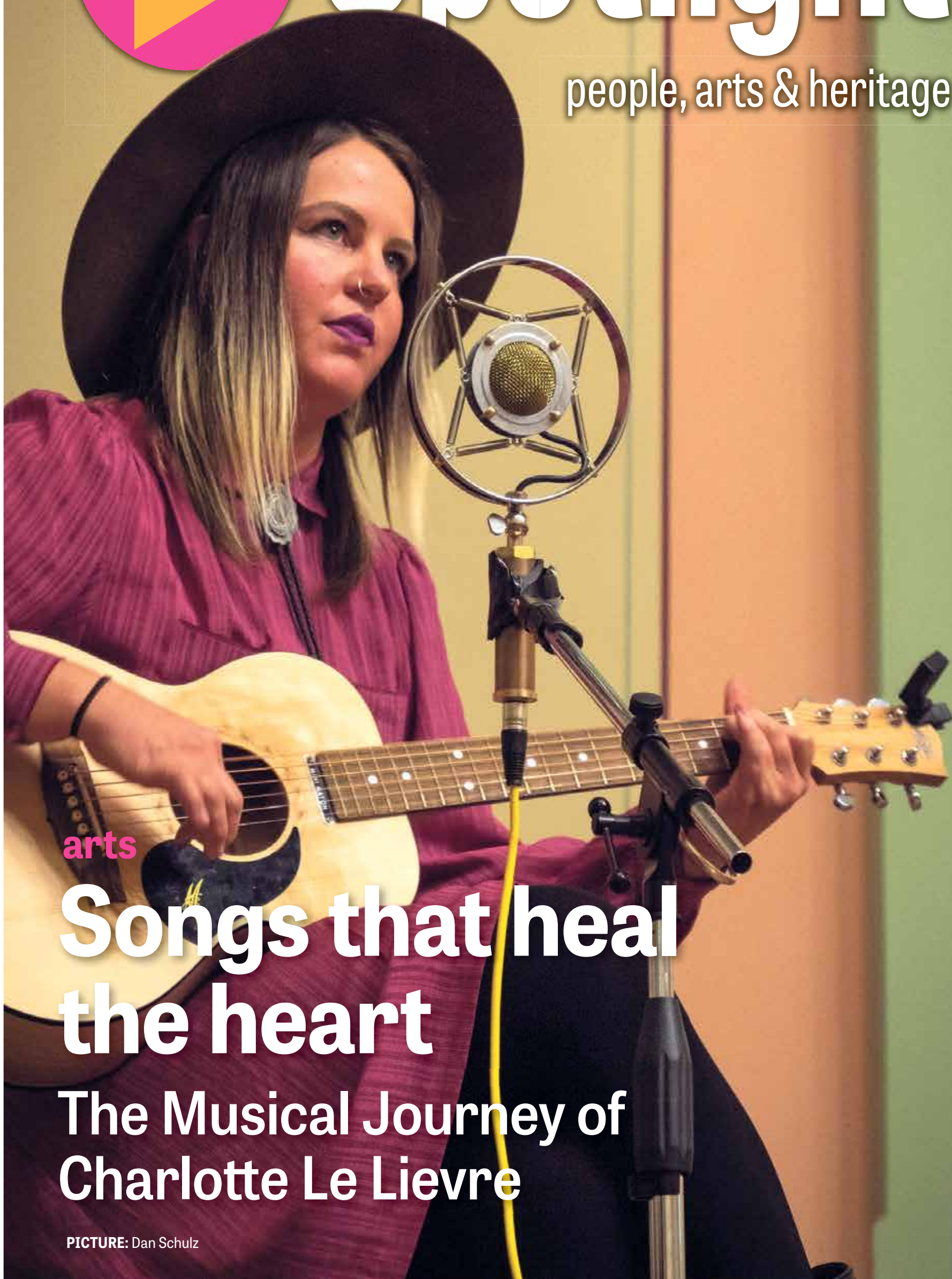




Spotlight

people, arts & heritage



arts

Songs that heal the heart

The Musical Journey of Charlotte Le Lievre

PICTURE: Dan Schulz

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Spotlight

Arts & Culture

Songs that heal the heart



Charlotte Buckton, AKA Charlotte Le Lievre, heals her heartache through songs of the Far West.

PICTURE: Dan Schulz

The musical journey of Charlotte Le Lievre

Dan Schulz

Some people move to Broken Hill to escape their past, wanting to make a fresh start and reinvent their identity in a town where they are anonymous. Others find it to be a place where they can contact a part of themselves that is painful and difficult to touch. Among the abundance of history, the land and country become a place of healing - a home for our most vulnerable selves.

Broken Hill has become such a place for Charlotte Buckton, a country and folk musician whose stage name is Charlotte Le Lievre, taking on her great-great grandmother's surname as a homage to her ancestors who settled in far west NSW in the 1860s. Charlotte comes from a protracted history of storytellers, her Nan, in particular, shared stories of her childhood with a young Charlotte, stories of sorrow and hardship.

"Nan had had a lot of grief in her life," Charlotte remembers, "So I was really connected with how storytelling was a way that she'd dealt with her grief."

Charlotte moved to Broken Hill in 2015 to work in community legal services and immediately identified with the semi-arid country of the far west.

"When I moved here, everyone in the family said, 'oh you're going back to the far west where your ancestors are from'. That became important to me because I felt so connected to this place and maybe that's because I have some genetic memory of it."

In the years that followed, Charlotte travelled back and forth between Broken Hill and her childhood home of Newcastle to care for her sick mother. It wasn't until her mother passed away in 2019 that Charlotte sought the far west as a place to heal her grief.

"After mum passed away, I'd lost my sense of home and I felt like I no longer had that anchor to go back to. Broken Hill was the closest thing I knew to a home, and there is something comforting about the landscape that I connect with that has become a new anchor for me."

It's through the act of songwriting that Charlotte has been able to confront the grief of her mother's passing, and it is the stories of the far west that have provided the allegories through which she can heal that heartache.

"Places hold memory and you can feel that memory, so I channel that feeling and put it into music. I often don't write about myself directly, I will pick a character or a perspective to be a vehicle for my story."

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Healing

By Dave Lehman

They took away our native land,
our children suffered at your hand,

Mismanaged fire water share,
without respect tradition care.

Sacred places mined and torn,
secret place of children born.

A once proud nation Bourke to sea,
reduced to beg their freedom plea.

Australia once a land for all,
abundant life the market stall.

With tucker under every tree,
rivers running strong and free.

Now over mined where soil is bled,
or overgrazed and cleared instead.

First nations people pushed aside,
fear that wealth and sense collide.

You sell this land that you don't own,
to people not Australian grown.

A politician loses way,
when they are leader of the day.

So ask the elders of this land,
to help you out with guiding hand.

Australia can be great once more,
embrace and heal the rift you tore.

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Over the years, Charlotte has developed a two-hour set of music which she calls, *Songs from the Barrier Line*, interweaving historical narratives about Broken Hill with her own personal experiences. Some songs are straightforward narrative ballads about Broken Hill using characters such as Joe Meech who founded Daydream mine. Others are ways of exploring how the land holds knowledge and provides a place of healing.

“When I first came out to the far west in 2008,” Charlotte explains, “I had this intense panic attack on the Darling river in Wilcannia. I was overwhelmed with grief and I didn't know what it was about at the time.”

Ten years later to the day, when Charlotte was visiting Mutawindji National Park, she received a phone call informing her that her mother had been admitted to hospital and Charlotte immediately began the drive back to Newcastle, stopping in Wilcannia on the way at the same place on the river.

“I had this flashback to that time ten years earlier when I had the panic attack. I believe the Darling river had actually split my grief through time because it would have been too much to experience all at once.”

Charlotte wrote a song about this experience and played it for her mother as a birthday present in the last year of her life. This song, *Weaver Of Time*, opens the second half of her show where Charlotte sings candidly about her personal experience of loss.

For Charlotte, music is an art form

through which we can transform our sorrow into joy and she lists as an important influence the old American female blues and jazz artists such as Bessie Smith, Lucille Bogan, Rosetta Tharpe, and Nina Simone - artists who used music to turn their grief into beauty, oppression into freedom, and disappointment into gratitude. In Charlotte's uplifting country ballad, *If I'd Looked With My Heart* she sings the chorus, ‘*If I'd looked with my heart instead of my eyes, I'd have seen you there right in front of me the whole time*’, transforming her loss into comfort, and acknowledging that her loved ones are with her in spirit.

Charlotte's music is a healing practice, not only for herself but for others, “I have a lot of issues with how grief is dealt with in western society,” she said, “It's so important to honour and acknowledge those stories and create space for other people to connect with their own grief, so there is a subtext of me wanting to be really honest about that and use music to communicate that.”

More than just the lyrics, you can hear the emotional journey of Charlotte's story in the timbre and phrasing of her vocals which are deep, mournful and intimate, like the blues artists she reveres, transporting you to a place beside the river, or late at night by the fire, in the pleasant company of lost loved ones.

Charlotte has most recently played with eight other musicians at Trades Hall for the *Songs In The Round* show in Broken Hill where she astonished the audience with her beautiful

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...I believe the Darling River had actually split my grief through time because it would have been too much to experience all at once.

and earnest expressions of love and loss. She is grateful to be part of a unique community of country and folk musicians who have established a distinctive music scene in Broken Hill, the likes of which cannot be found anywhere else in Australia, bringing the history of the far west to life through song and teaching us, with genuine expressions of real-life hardships, how music can heal the heart.

This year Charlotte is going to be recording a selection of songs from her repertoire for an album, *Songs from the Barrier Line* and in September she will be performing her set of the same name at the Broken Hill Art Exchange.



Charlotte Le Lievre has developed a two-hour set of music she calls *Songs From the Barrier Line* that interweave historical narratives about Broken Hill along with her own personal experiences. PICTURE: Dan Schulz