

# Hubbub inventor sets sail for Korea

By Leigh Robshaw

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STEVE LANGTON, the Reesville-based creator of Hubbub Music, is headed for South Korea to participate in a multi-million dollar cultural arts project that will see him take his eccentric sound installation work to its greatest heights since Hubbub was formed in 1995.

Hubbub is best known for its madcap ‘weapon of mass percussion’, the Sprocket, a mainstay of the street theatre at Woodford Folk Festival; the Pyrophone Juggernaut, a towering fire organ that was the highlight of opening night at the Sydney Festival and Adelaide Fringe Festival earlier this year; and the Sound Playgrounds, which Steve estimates have been played by more than a million people over the past ten years.

The first stage of Hubbub’s upcoming Korean projects will be the construction of a scale model of

an ancient merchant ship from the Chinese Song dynasty that sunk off

the south-west coast of Korea around 1323 en route from China to Japan.

From November to June next year, Steve and his partner, Witta artist Emma McDonald, and a handpicked crew of helpers will create what Steve calls a “space age replica” of the ship, which in true Hubbub style will be an interactive musical experience that will draw in people of all ages and musical abilities.

Known in Korea as ‘Sinason’ (Sinan ship), the wreck was salvaged from the seabed off Jeungdo, an island in Sinan County, in 1976. It was one of the world’s richest underwater archaeological discoveries of 23,500 relics.

At 12 metres long and 10 metres high, Hubbub's ship will be a third of the size of the original ship and will be called the Treasure Song Ship. The hull will be stainless steel and concrete, with tracking solar panels covered in stainless steel mesh forming the sails. The lower level will be what Steve calls "Ali Baba's shiny cave", filled with musical replicas of the priceless artefacts that were found on the ship. Upstairs, musical treasures will be hidden in the deck, with unexpected surprises like floorboards that move and make sound.

Not surprisingly, when Steve isn't tripping around countless communities turning all manner of people onto his groovy instruments, he's a regular visitor to the Wastebusters tip at Witt.

"There's so much waste in industry and most people are just workers, they don't own the means of production so they don't care if they waste it," says Steve. "If you're an artist, you're trying to do way too much for way too little money, so it's good to save money. Often it's the materials themselves that make the instruments, so if you've got an eye for a shape you just collect those things."

Steve has been called a creative genius and a musical pioneer, shaped by an unconventional childhood in India with a "Mr fix-it" father and a saxophonist mother. Hubbub's creations are unique in the world, their sheer originality derived from Steve's ability to see music, or the potential for it, everywhere and in everything. Mag wheels, for instance, make perfect bells.

"I saw a pool filter and it gave me the idea of making the sub-vibe, which is like something you'd see in a museum from an ancient civilisation. I remember looking through a book of ancient African instruments and saw a huge kalabash which was a 400-year-old African court instrument carved out of a plank. Obviously Africans were into this 400 years ago. There's nothing new, but there's new materials, like plastic, aluminium and stainless steel, which I use for instrument making. I'm always on the lookout for crazy new stuff."



Steve puts finishing touches to the turtle sculpture  
Photos: Errol Larkan

Hubbub recently installed a Sound Playground at Basket Range Primary School in the Adelaide Hills, a true community effort with parents, teachers and kids pitching in.

"We gave them a list of junk to collect," says Steve. "Food was delivered to us, the parents were there working with us, and the kids just attacked the

instruments with such gleeful ferocity. One of the dads worked for an armoured personnel carrier factory, so we used the armour plate to make a metallophone. So now we can say we have weapons grade instruments!"

Steve says even though he's often flat broke, he feels like one of the richest people in the world, because his instruments are bringing the joy of music to countless people he doesn't know and has never met, and due to their durability, that music will continue for generations to come.

"Sometimes I'll revisit a piece and I'll see a grandfather and grandson playing this thing they've just discovered. Art in galleries is a bit of a yawn for

me. We've kind of lost our way with music and sculpture that you're not allowed to touch. We're into bringing music to people, and especially kids, all over the place.

"This work that we're doing, there's nothing like it anywhere in the world. You try and Google it and it's not there."

Says Emma: "Steve's choice of application to a musical format helps people that don't necessarily understand music. The music is very accessible and it doesn't take much effort to get a good sound out of hitting a tuned bar."

Steve would like to work with more people who share his vision in the future, saying that community music is not his, it's ours.

"When people play music together there's a fantastic magic that happens and you know it feels good, and there should be more of it. I find it exciting to watch the germination of an idea and then the flowering of the instruments, which touch

