

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 I arrived back in Adelaide after three exciting, full on, yet amazing weeks at the mecca of Australian Country Music – Tamworth.

Before I go into detailing what these 3 weeks entailed, I'd like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to your organisation for supporting me in not only achieving my long-term goal of attending the CMAA Academy of Country Music Senior Course however, for supporting a young, up and coming singer/songwriter such as myself. Our industry is in great need of this kind of support behind young artists to continue to encourage newcomers to the genre and to offer these great opportunities. In doing so, together we are able to ensure the longevity of the Australian Country Music community, which I am lucky enough to be a part of.



On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January I travelled from Adelaide to Sydney and then caught a tiny propeller plane to Tamworth. From Tamworth's Regional Airport I went straight to Calrossy Anglican Girls School (which the CMAA use), which I would call home for the next two weeks.



From the moment I arrived, I was rubbing shoulders with some of the industry's biggest stars – Roger Corbett, Catherine Britt, Kevin Bennett, Lyn Bowtell, Lachlan Bryan, Amber Lawrence, Simon Johnson, Allan Caswell, Fanny Lumsden, Aleyce Simmonds and Lawrie Minson...just to name a few!

I quickly got to know my peers, whose hometowns ranged all the way from Mount Gambier to Mackay to Canberra, and even Timaru in New Zealand! We were given the first night to settle in and get to know each other. However, the intensive two weeks began at 8:00am sharp the next day. A usual day at the Academy was structured something like this:

- 7:30am – Breakfast
- 8:30am – Warm Ups with Roger Corbett and Lyn Bowtell
- 9:00am – Lecture with an industry professional
- 10:45am – Morning Tea
- 11:15am – Song writing/music theory
- 1:00pm – Lunch
- 2:00pm – Group sessions/rehearsals
- 5:00pm – Free time or extended group sessions/rehearsals
- 6:00pm – Dinner
- 7:00pm – Group workshops (guitar, vocals, jam session, performance)
- 11:00pm – Bedtime!



On the second night we were thrown straight into an informal concert in front of our peers and tutors so that our musical ability could be assessed and categorised into 3 groups. It was amazing to see just how unique and talented every single individual was. There was a wide range of styles and skills that were showcased that night.

I love how the Academy accepts and supports all styles of country music - from the classic old-school country and western, all the way to the modern alternative Americana style. I really encourage our South Australian country music fans to have a listen and even embrace some of the newer, modern styles of country as I believe one of the greatest aspects of our industry is it's broad nature and acceptance of a variety of styles, which all relate back to the great stories within the songs.



I was so excited when I found out that I was put into Golden Guitar winner, Lachlan Bryan's group. Lachlan is an incredibly gifted songwriter who comes from Melbourne and is known for being the lead singer in the award winning, alt-country band Lachlan Bryan and The Wilds. Coming to the Academy, I was nervous about sharing the songs that I had been writing in my bedroom since I was 12 years old. I felt most comfortable singing covers by my favourite artists such as Patsy Cline, Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt etc. I knew that I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone and that there was no better place to do so! Lachlan pushed me to sing my own original songs, which I performed at both of our live performances during the Academy.



Our first performance was held at the end of our first week at a venue called The Pub. The Pub is known for its casual and relaxed atmosphere, and hosts a large quantity of shows throughout the festival.

We had a full day of rehearsals with the Academy Band – made up of the instrumental students, and then performed that night to a large audience. Within each group, every individual was involved in other student's songs. Whether it was



joining in on the tambourine or shaker, singing backing vocals or playing rhythm guitar, it was a great way to expand our skills and get to know each other. It was a really laid back gig and we were all encouraged to just have fun – a great reminder of what music is really about and an introduction for what was to come!



One of the most memorable moments for me throughout the Academy was the day that Kasey Chambers came to visit. She arrived at lunch time and sat down at the table I was sitting at. It was a surreal moment having Kasey Chambers – one of my country music idols who I had first seen singing her hit Not Pretty Enough on the Country Music Channel when I was just 4 years old, sitting across the table from me.

Later that evening we all had a jam session with her, and Kasey made the rule that she wouldn't leave until she had heard everyone sing a song. We handed her

guitar around the circle and each played a song for her, along with hearing her sing some of her greatest hits up close and acoustic. I sang one of my original songs and she came up to chat with me afterwards, encouraging me to continue to write and sing my originals.

Kasey was so down to earth and incredibly funny! It's inspiring to see someone who has so much talent and subsequently has had so much success, still be so genuinely interested in fostering new, up and coming talent. If you ever get the opportunity to go and see her perform live, I urge you to buy a ticket!



The next week included more lectures, mentoring sessions and workshops with a wide range of names within the industry. I co-wrote two awesome songs with Allan Caswell and Matt Scullion, was featured in the local newspaper, and spoke on the radio three times.



Before I knew it, we were approaching our very last days and rehearsing for the big Graduation Concert held at West Tamworth Leagues Club, one of Tamworth's largest venues. We spent the second half of the week rehearsing the entire show. It was exhausting but it all paid off in the end. The show was almost sold out and the feedback from the audience was positive. I sang my original song Autumn's Ending, which I co-wrote

with Matt Scullion (Matt has co-written on all of Lee Kernaghan's albums), sung backing vocals and played guitar on every song from my group. One of the highlights of the night was the finale song, John Denver's Country Roads. It was an emotional moment singing beside my new friends knowing that our time at the Academy was almost up.

On the final night we had the opportunity to open the 45<sup>th</sup> Tamworth Country Music Festival on the huge Toyota Stage for the annual opening concert. Together, all of the Academy students sang an Australian medley in front of a huge crowd in Bi-Centennial Park. It was such an awesome way to conclude our time at the Academy and kick off the festival!



After graduating, I was given some incredible opportunities during the festival. I was lucky enough to be the only artist chosen out of all of the Academy students to open for Ben Ransom at his show at The Albert Hotel, I was asked by Roger Corbett and Dobe Newton (the president of the CMAA) to sing at The Bushwhackers Crazy Beach Party – a popular Tamworth favourite. I joined SA's own Amber Joy Poulton for a few Dolly Parton songs at her Queens of Country show, Amber Lawrence invited me to sing at one of her gig's where we sang a duet of her song Honeysuckle, and I got to meet Beccy Cole and Adam Harvey and was an extra in their new music video. I also competed in the Aristocrat Entertainer of The Year competition where I won second place. Along with all of



these, I played a number of gigs over the week and made some great friends and industry contacts.

Graduating from the CMAA Academy of Country Music has completely opened my eyes to a whole other perspective of the industry. From co-writing, to music theory, to recording, and all the way to making music videos and getting them played on CMC, I feel as though I now have the skills and knowledge to begin my career as an original country artist.

The high standard of talent that comes out of the Academy is certainly palpable and it is safe to say that with its help, young artists are in safe hands! This experience has given mw the tools and invaluable information on how to utilise them successfully within this ever changing, competitive, yet exciting



industry, and I am hopeful for not only my future, but also the future of the genre as a whole.

This year I look towards writing new songs and recording an E.P consisting of these, which I hope to release late this year/early next year. I am also excited to continue to perform around SA and interstate.



Once again, I'd like to thank you for assisting me in reaching this goal and allowing me to have this priceless experience. I am now heading in the right direction towards beginning my career and I hope that every up and coming singers/songwriters like myself also have the opportunity to be involved in a course as fulfilling and unique as the CMAA Academy of Country Music. It is only through this kind of support for young talent that we can keep Country Music alive, and it is vital to our industry that we continue to nurture and encourage young talent, especially in South Australia.

I look forward to continuing to be involved, and watching our great Australian Country Music develop and thrive.