Film sings to the heart

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

A life-affirming doco set in a Dandenong school has captured hearts and awards all over the world.

Singfest: The Literacy of Music is now set to share the uplifting feats of students and staff with SBS TV audiences across Australia.

Film-maker Amel Tresnjic captured nine schools celebrating music and song at Emerson School on 3 September 2015.

Sounds simple, but it was described by one of the students as "the best day of my life".

That day has lived long in the 49-minute film, which was first released on You Tube.

It has since earned 18 international awards for documentary excellence including Best Inspirational Film at the New York Film Awards in 2019.

Mr Tresnjic said he had wanted to show what a unique place that Emerson School was and the "tremendous difference" it made in the lives of children with special needs.

He also wanted to highlight the "power" of the arts and music on the development of children.

"The lack of understanding of this creates roadblocks for many of them, in particular for students with disabilities.

"What Emerson School has demonstrated is how music literacy can be successfully used as a tool to make these roadblocks disappear and elevate students to higher achievements."

Mr Tresnjic has won 55 international film festival awards, including for films set at the nearby Dandenong North Primary School where his wife Azemina Tresnjic teaches.

She features in an upcoming doco Giving Back – which charts former students such as Azemina who have returned to Dandenong North Primary as teachers.

Singfest students warmed to the power of music.

Students taking part in Singfest at Emerson School in 2015, which became an international hit documentary.

His series of Dandenong-school films focus on "human stories of school leaders and teachers working very hard to make a difference in children's lives".

"Both remind us that helping others generates a strong source of inner happiness.

"I think that is the reason why the films have won hearts across the globe.

"We have had a few viewers express how the films inspired them to pursue teaching, which is amazing."

He seeks to find true stories of "real heroes", to "share new things" and "elevate our understanding".

And to remind viewers about "the good in the world".

He nominates Emerson School principal John Mooney and Dandenong North Primary principal Kevin Mackay as his "heroes".

"They are my definition of what every leader should be like. "They are visionaries who truly understand the needs, not only of students but also their staff and overall community.

"Both have dedicated their lives to helping the disadvantaged build successful careers, and most importantly set a high standard for virtues in the community."

Singfest now joins another of Mr Tresnjic's docos on the SBS catalogue - Talk for Life: English as an Additional Language.

Singfest's participating schools were Dandenong North Primary, St Gerard's Primary, Silverton Primary, Lyndale Greens Primary, Rosewood Downs Primary, Wooranna Park Primary, Lyndale Secondary College, Dandenong High School, St Margaret's School Berwick and Emerson School.

Singfest: The Literacy of Music screens on SBS TV on Monday 1 August at 2pm.

FOCUS ON ... TAX TIME

Check your income details, urges Australian Tax Office

The Australian Taxation Office is urging people to make sure their income details are complete and finalised before seeing their chosen tax agent.

For most Australians, income statements have replaced payment summaries. This means that instead of receiving a payment summary from their employer, most people's income statements will be finalised electronically, and the information provided directly to the ATO.

You can view your income statement through myGov and the information from it is automatically included in your return in myTax by the ATO. If you use a tax agent, they will also have access to this information.

Income statements show their year-to-date salary and wages, PAYG withholding tax, and any employer super contributions in near real-time, but it is important to wait until it is finalised before lodging a tax return. Employers have until July 31 to finalise income statements.

"We often see people too eager to get a tax refund making obvious mistakes, which can either delay processing the tax return or result in a bill later on," ATO assistant commissioner Karen Foat said.

"It's important to check that your employer has finalised the information in your income statement and it is marked as 'tax ready' before you lodge.

"Other information from banks, health funds and government agencies will also be automatically inserted into your tax return. For most people this will happen by the end of July.

"Lodging once we have included all of your information in your tax return makes it even easier, but if you are lodging before then, make sure the information provided is complete, accurate, and up to date to avoid delays or a debt later on," Ms Foat said.

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