

SUMMER and autumn are at their end, and with them goes that marvellous array of music festivals that the warmer weather invites.

A friend who is a Uniting Church minister says she thinks the Port Fairy Folk Festival is pretty much heaven on earth.

She is unperturbed by camping with her toddlers cheek-by-jowl with thousands of other festival-goers. Her explanation? "There is beauty alongside frailty; there's a grace between people of all ages and stages of life. It's a feast, a gathering of the folk."

I too love being swept away by music on a rising tide that is the energy of hundreds or even thousands of people listening together at a festival. In the huge marquees or the smaller venues at Port Fairy we are a sea of faces, an ocean of listening. And there is something humble about the low-slung camping seats we lug around. They are part of the landscape, though I struggle out of them with less elegance year by year.

Nestled there between the river and the sea, we listen to live music.



The relationship between the performers and the audience is real and immediate. The best performers know how to honour this. Nano Stern is a young Chilean musician whose respect for the privilege of the exchange is evident.

Reviewer Andrew Cronshaw says of him: "When he sings you listen, even if you don't understand Spanish, because it feels like the truth." There are moments when the integrity and passion of a performer is so present,

it is as if the whole gathering is lifted together with an intake of breath. Something has been witnessed.

Sometimes when I am perched on my camping chair in one of the big marquees, I think of Jesus addressing the crowds. I imagine the hush needed for the words to resonate on the Galilean hillside. There under the desert sun with no sound desk, no foldback, no thrum of strings or rhythm of drums to frame the stories; just a bunch of people who were hungry and presumably hanging on every word.

The parables were spare if not harsh, the grass would not have been lush, the seating would not have been comfortable. What a strange and remarkable set of events.

It makes me want to lean into the parables, to wonder more curiously what people heard in them. I think of people sitting on rocky ground in hot sun with no food, listening to the ungilded words of a Galilean preacher. Something compelling caught them. An ancient song echoing, a new song beginning.

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