



Wow, it's Womad

Sarah Foy

When Jan Robertson's Wintec students take a field trip this week they'll be driving south three hours to hear and see international artists.

The group of nine is to witness a major event in action when they volunteer at Womad (World of Art Music and Dance), which takes place in New Plymouth over the coming weekend. All are enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of Practical Event Management.

Robertson, the group's tutor, says seeing and experiencing a festival like this is the best way for her students to learn. Womad is unique because its three days of performances, workshops, food and activity includes artists from many countries. It's also in a park with significant tracts of native bush on its fringes and an amphitheatre with a lake wrapped part way round the stage.

Acts are spread across six stages and there's a hill to navigate, says Robertson. "They learn about a challenging venue, and how you can get the best out of it. They will discover what works and doesn't work . . . and not to take stage locations for granted.

"One band can play on the TSB Bowl stage and not be effective. The same band plays on either the Brooklands or Gables stage and the sound is totally different. You need to be there to experience this, and that key learning can add to your basket of tools for the future."

It's also an excellent event to volunteer at, says Robertson, who has worked at a range of fixtures such as the 2010 rowing world champs, the Rugby World Cup 2011 and the Sir Edmund Hillary 50th celebrations.

The Taranaki Arts Festival Trust runs Womad. It uses and reviews best practice, says Robertson.

"Womad staff know what works and doesn't work for this venue. Each year they produce a magical lineup. It's a very challenging lineup and very complex programming."

She and her students are going for the first time, although Robertson, who went to high school in New Plymouth, has been to four Womad festivals since it started in the city in 2003.

The Wintec team won't be doing any of the event management - rather they'll help implement the Shell NZ Zero Waste programme run at Womad. It is a multi-faceted programme, integrating the four Rs of waste minimisation (reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink), in order to divert the amount of rubbish going to landfill.

During shifts spread over the festival, teams of three will sort waste in the backstage areas, ensuring performers and backstage crew know where rubbish goes. They'll also keep an eye on what goes in and out of the site.

It's not a glamorous task but Robertson says many events these days aim to leave a site as clean as it was when they arrived.

"Providing education on current recycling best practice is an essential contribution to the environment. To be able to be part of this event and provide education to participants is a very rare opportunity."

She and the students will be among the 500-odd volunteers who keep the wheels of Womad turning. In turn, the Wintec crew receives accommodation, free entry and a T-shirt. Then there's the buzz of being involved, she says.

"The atmosphere is amazing, it's a good-quality venue, friendly organisers, and an international event. The artists and the quality of the programme are amazing; plus there's excellent support for volunteers."

"We feel very privileged to be part of this event."



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WOMAD 2013

- Womad NZ 2013 runs March 15-17 at the TSB Bowl of Brooklands and Brooklands Park in New Plymouth.
- Last year 43,900 people attended over the three days.
- This year's lineup includes 41 acts from more than 20 countries.
- There are also workshops, a cooking marquee, a kidzone, overnight camping, shops and food stalls.
- Three-day passes or single-day tickets available from Ticketek.
- For more info and the full lineup, see womad.co.nz.



Taskforce: Wintec students will be immersed in a global festival when they head to New Plymouth as festival volunteers tomorrow. Back from left: Nadine Tabak, Stephanie Senora, Haerun Wering, Jan Robertson (tutor) and Marie Rechner. Front from left: Emma Langman, Kirsten Chisnall, Gurnoor Kaur and Rachelle Bertram.



Hands-on experience: Jan Robertson, Wintec lecturer in the Graduate Diploma of Practical Event Management.