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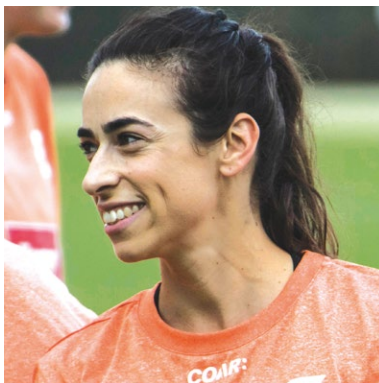
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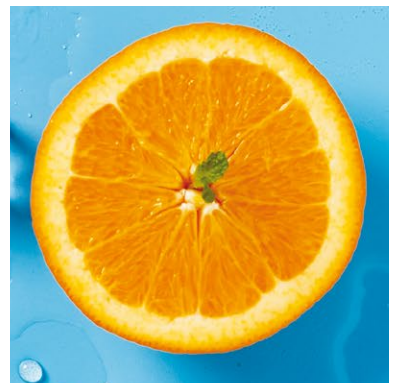


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COSTA GEORGIADIS

By D.R. Lennox

"If we can get people interested in plants and horticulture and growing and gardening, then the wonderful overlay is that it then hooks them into the importance of nutrition and health."

Last December marked six years since Costa Georgiadis was announced as the host of *Gardening Australia*; replacing Peter Cundall, the long-time and much-loved host of the ABC program. They were big gum boots to fill but Costa, with his signature 'wild man' beard and infectious passion for all things green, has made the role his own.

That love of nature and passion for gardening was one instilled in Costa by his grandfather. "He was a market gardener, a man of the earth. He was constantly working in the garden. When I came onto the scene he was retired but then living in Sydney with a backyard that to me, at that point, was a fairy land; a wonderland of just everything growing," Costa recalls.

His grandfather was also an environmentalist somewhat ahead of his time. "He was a sustainability leader back then: he was reusing, recycling, up-cycling, re-purposing. They didn't throw things away; there was no waste, there were no big bins. So he was my inspiration, particularly the more I do what I do, and the more I see how the solutions to our challenge is a lot simpler than we need to think them to be."

It is perhaps because of that grandfather-grandson dynamic that Costa himself is very much about engaging and educating children; citing "the power of children 'getting it', and the continual building and extension of school gardens and community gardens throughout the country" as some of the high points of his work. "Because when kids 'get it', they've got it. They don't lose it," he insists.

Thankfully, Costa believes adults are starting to 'get it' too. "I think people

are making a distinct connection now between their health and nutrition and who's growing their food and how they're growing their food. And that's exciting," he says. "If we can get people interested in plants and horticulture and growing and gardening, then the wonderful overlay is that it then hooks them into the importance of nutrition and health, and activity and ecosystems; how if you want to have a healthy ecosystem you need to have gardens, you need plants, you need birds, you need the insects, you need the flowers to feed the insects. The absolute web of life needs to be wrapped around us wherever we're living or working."

Costa believes the evolving food scene in Australia is playing its part too. "That's a good point about the whole foodie scene:

the foodie scene is making people more aware of the ingredients, and step-by-step the changes are happening," he observes. "There are elements of that I have challenges with, in terms of people being dogmatic about 'I need these ingredients for this recipe' without understanding the seasonality, but it's bringing that in and making people more aware of seasonality."

"The major outlets for food in the cities provide everything all the year round. People don't know there is a mango season. It hides the reality of the seasons. If we eat seasonally that's better for us because that's what our bodies need now," Costa says, recommending that if a fruit or vegetable is a Spring food "eat it in Spring, celebrate it in Spring. Load up!"

Naturally, Costa practices what he preaches; a supporter of grower's markets ("that's my little way of saying 'I'm supporting you, I'm backing you,

I'll buy what you've got'"), he also loves to cook. "I cook ever day." One of his favourite foods is horta, or "wild weeds", a nod to his Greek heritage.

"I love horta and I love the fact horta vary. And everywhere you go [in Greece], whether you're in Crete, or on Paros or Naxos, or in Athens, horta vary from the mountains to the sea. And they're a side dish with every meal, and that's your edible greens."

"I love swimming and surfing. I love travel and I love just being in the moment, and thinking about what's going on around me. I love bushwalking and just getting overawed, and looking at the details of nature," he says, immediately commenting on the state of some nearby trees and their relation to the urban environment. That's not surprising given that Costa, before he became a television host, was, and remains, a landscape architect.

And whether on TV, or in life, he's drawn to similarly passionate people. "People who are just so into one plant, that level of intent and introspection is inspiring because they've dedicated 40 or 50 years to orchids or native plants, or bush tucker, or vegetables or seed saving," Costa says. "I see amazing inspiration in every person."

**Images courtesy of
Gardening Australia/ABC**



MAMMA MIA

By Tricia Duffield

"I'll admit that while Sarah and I were rehearsing I Have A Dream the other day, I had a bit of a teary moment. It brought back a lot of memories. It was beautiful."

It's a decade or so ago. The curtains are about to open on another performance of Mamma Mia! The lead role is being played by a young musical theatre artist, Natalie O'Donnell. In the QPAC audience is an 11-year-old girl, Sarah Morrison, and this is the first musical she's ever seen. This night will change her life.

Wind the clock forward. Mamma Mia! is touring Australia again, re-imagined and re-worked. In the lead role is the little girl from the QPAC audience, Sarah Morrison, now an accomplished performer. In the other female lead role is Natalie O'Donnell, the woman who inspired her; the two sharing not just the stage but a unique theatre relationship.

Adding another dimension to the bond between Natalie and Sarah are the roles they'll be inhabiting for the next 12 months. Natalie, almost a decade older and wiser than when she first was cast in Mamma Mia!, is now the senior female lead as the mother-of-the-bride, Donna Sheridan. Sarah plays the role that Natalie brought to life a decade earlier, the young bride-to-be, Sophie.

It's real life and art entwined and both women acknowledge the sweet synchronicity of it. Natalie is now one of Australia's most experienced performers with a long list of credits behind her, a wife and mother of two children. Still beautiful, and still in demand for her extraordinary skills.

"It is an amazing coincidence that we are both in this production and I think it brings another dimension to the story," Natalie says. "It's really special seeing someone else take on a role you know so well and add their take on it. I'll admit that while Sarah and I were rehearsing I Have A Dream the other day, I had a bit of a teary moment. It

brought back a lot of memories. It was beautiful."

Mamma Mia! is a juggernaut; an international franchise now in its 18th year in theatres around the world. It's been around long enough for a whole new generation to have discovered the music of Abba and become familiar with the plot. If you haven't seen it yet, it's almost inevitable that you probably will. This latest version will be touring Australia until late 2018.

It's a show that just keeps on giving, with this Australian production the first re-imagining of the original, with new costumes, sets and staging. Natalie is keen to point out, however, that it is in no way an Abba tribute. The music is just part of the landscape.

"Of course, I didn't know that when Mamma Mia! first came out. Hard to imagine but there wasn't as much use of the internet in the early 2000s when it first came to Australia, so unless you'd seen it or heard about it, you wouldn't know any better," she says. "When I went to audition I dressed up in this awful Seventies gear – heels, loud pants and big hair – and when I got there I realised I'd made a horrible mistake! They were very kind though and just said 'Can you come back in just shorts, thongs and a beach look?' So embarrassing!"

Natalie's career began with Les Miserables and has seen her almost constantly in work in musicals here and overseas. Most recently she has performed in Jerry's Girls, Songs For a New World and Next To Normal. Natalie's husband Simon Gleeson is also a well-known theatre performer, most recently touring with Les Miserables, and their work saw them based in London for five years.

"We came back to Australia and then went back to London for nine months thinking it would be almost permanent, and then we just looked at each other one day and said 'let's go home', and we're based here now in Geelong," Natalie explains.

"And although the industry isn't as big in Australia, it's really buoyant at the moment so there are opportunities for performers. Unlike on Broadway or the West End, artists here aren't always looking towards the next show. We have to focus on the show we're in, not what we might be trying out for next. For that reason, we have a hugely respected work ethic. Directors in the United States and England really want what we bring, that commitment and work ethic."

Natalie admits they've been fortunate to have been cast in big budget productions. "In the end, though," she says "It's all about heart. I only go for roles that I feel for. Yes, I still audition and that can be a grind but I've become better at it over the years. I've also learnt it's important to say no."

Like Natalie, Sarah Morrison is versatile, committed to her craft – and realistic. "I started out in the Children's Chorus of Opera Queensland but I always knew I wanted to act. It was after seeing Mamma Mia! at QPAC that I decided on a career in theatre," she recalls. "I've been very lucky. I've worked in children's theatre in the United Arab Emirates and Asia and I've been really fortunate to have performed in an originating lead role. Ladies in Black was an incredible piece of original Australian theatre and is now being made into a film. To have been part of that was very special."

"Having the role of Sophie in Mamma Mia!, in a big budget production – with



us being the first cast to perform it with new sets and staging – that’s an incredible experience, and a bit nerve-racking as well.”

Sarah moved from her home town Brisbane to Ballarat when she was 19, to study at the Arts Academy. “That’s where my adult life began,” she says. “But at the moment I really live out of a suitcase. I’ve sent some of my things back home because I really don’t have a base right now.”

At 27, Sarah is too young to have been caught up in the music of Abba first time around, and *Mamma Mia!* has been the vehicle through which she’s become intimately familiar with the genius of Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus. “The songs are so joyful, I think that’s why people still love the music,” she says. “And the storyline of *Mamma Mia!* is just beautiful. Because we are working with such uplifting, fun material, we are all really enjoying the relationships we’re building through

the storyline and just being together doing this show. There are a number of returning cast members so it has a sort of alumni feel to it.”

So what is it that gives *Mamma Mia!*, which premiered last century, its longevity? That can hold not just audiences across the decades, but performers as well? The story, about a bride-to-be, her mother and the search for her real father, was written by Catherine Johnson and premiered in London in 1999. It has graced stages in Japan, Canada, the United States, Australia, Russia, Mexico, Scandinavia, the Caribbean.

“The story is a universal one,” Natalie offers. “Everyone can relate to it no matter where it’s showing because it’s about relationships, it’s about feelings and experiences we all share.”

It has certainly resonated with the more than 60 million people who have seen the show to-date. *Mamma Mia!*

has grossed an astonishing \$2 billion worldwide. It had a 14-year run on Broadway and was the ninth longest running musical in London’s West End. Statistically, it is the theatre definition of a juggernaut. Then there’s the 2008 film version, starring Meryl Streep, Amanda Seyfried, Colin Firth and Pierce Brosnan, which grossed more than \$600 million, and which will see a sequel, *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again!* (teaming Streep with Silkwood co-star Cher) releasing later this year.

But what makes this Australian production so special is that within all those overpowering statistics are the very human stories of the people who bring it all to life. Like the story of an 11-year-old girl, inspired by the star of the show, who end up walking the boards together.

Images by Peter Brew Bevan

AMANDA FARRUGIA

By Kristina Foster

"I've played a lot of sports in my life and AFL is my favourite. AFL is a sport where no matter your natural size or skill, there is always a position in the team where you can use your strengths to contribute."

She's been badly bruised, torn ligaments in her knee and broken her nose from a flying elbow. But her relentless passion for her game is unrivalled. Amanda Farrugia, is the 31-year-old Aussie rules footballer playing for the Greater Western Sydney Giants in the AFL Women's competition. She is the club's team captain and considered one of the toughest in the game, influencing and inspiring a new generation of local athletes and fans.

As a New South Welshman, I felt I never fully understood AFL. It was a game the cousins from the south liked a lot but my family were all about league. Watching my first AFL game, I was in awe as players grabbed the ball and charged down the field at lightning-fast speed, their legs powering on in a blur. The average AFL player runs anywhere between 12 and 20 kilometres per game. When it comes to skill, AFL is a funny, sometimes clumsy looking game: you get penalised for throwing a pass and have to punch the ball away from you. However, a great deal of skill is required in order to find your teammate with a punch that requires near-perfect accuracy across great distances.

These AFL players have been known to kick goals from up to 50 metres out with amazing accuracy to find their player down the field. And I'm talking about watching a women's footy game. The raw athleticism displayed by these remarkable AFL women is truly inspiring. It's a game of speed, grace, balance, skill and fitness, not just brawn. These are modern-day girl gladiators who slay in the arena.

Women's AFL has drawn sell-out crowds around the country culminating with the 2017 grand final which was watched on TV by more than 1.1 million people around Australia. "Western Sydney is a league heartland but AFL is on the rise," smiles Farrugia cheekily.

Amanda certainly embodies the battling gladiator every time she steps onto the field as captain of New South Wales' only AFLW team. Farrugia grew up in Greystanes in Western Sydney, and living in league territory played touch footy before starting her AFL career in 2011.

"My brother was a mad AFL fan. He was always calculating stats and talking about players. It inspired me to give it a go, and I never looked back. I've played a lot of sports in my life and AFL is my favourite. AFL is a sport where no matter your natural size or skill, there is always a position in the team where you can use your strengths to contribute. There's a wide scope of physical challenges: you can kick, you can use your hands, there's physical contact, high balls and low balls – it's a 360-degree exercise," admits Farrugia.

Growing up, Farrugia never imagined sport could present itself as a potential career; certainly not for a girl. "I was the kind of the kid who wanted to do all of the things that the boys wanted to do, but it was still relatively frowned upon. I had to develop thick skin and resilience early on."

Farrugia, or 'Fridge' to her teammates, is the name you need to know. From starting the sport just six years ago, she was recently awarded the Mostyn Medal for 'best and fairest' (for the second time) in the Sydney Women's AFL league, where she plays when she's not training with the Giants

Standing at just 165cm, Farrugia is light-framed but packs a punch. She's quick, agile and rarely wastes a disposal. And she possesses an elite work ethic; it's 3.30pm and Farrugia has just finished her day job as a P.E. teacher at Our Lady of Mercy College, an all-girls high school at Parramatta. Farrugia aims to change perspectives about women playing contact sport, starting with her own school where a team of her students now play club AFL as well as trial for state representative teams.

"Seeing somebody who works full-time, who is married, playing a contact sport, it contradicts all of the ideas they have in their head, it shows that girls can do whatever they want. It doesn't matter what people think, it's whether or not you enjoy it and the value it brings to your life," states Farrugia proudly.

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During pre-season, Farrugia heads from her job at school to Olympic Park for a gruelling training session with her team, consisting of a program of weights and track work, finishing around 9.30pm every night. “It’s a long day but I enjoy every minute of it because I’m doing what I love.”

Having finished last on the ladder in 2017, the Greater Western Sydney Giants are the underdogs going into this next season but change is in the wind, with new coach Alan McConnell taking the reins in 2018. With more than 40 years’ involvement in the game, McConnell brings a wealth of football experience. McConnell also coaches the men’s Greater Western Sydney team. “I feel Alan will bring a renewed cohesiveness to our game and hone in on a quicker, more free-flowing style of play. He’s a real footy brain,” explains Farrugia, eagerly.

Farrugia, with her quick wit, impish smile and exhilarating energy is an inspiration. “Don’t let people tell you shouldn’t play a sport because you’re a girl – girls are entitled to do whatever they want to do!”

Images courtesy of GWS Giants Football Club

JAKE FRIEND

By Anthony Anderson

"You want to be surrounded by good people that enjoy coming to work and enjoy the vibe. As much as you put in is as much as you get out of anything."

Being a life-long Sydney Roosters fan, I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to sit down and talk to the current Roosters captain at his Randwick café, High St Society. The café, which opened its doors in January 2017, is owned by Jake Friend and two business partners. My duty upon arrival was to order the house organic, fair trade coffee. Turns out that the coffee is supplied by former rugby league player, Ryan Girdler. Perhaps there's a theme here.

"Growing up, I always liked cooking and always liked food, so when the opportunity came up I decided to have a crack at it," Jake says, explaining the move into hospitality. The opportunity was introduced to him by now business partner, Dave, owner of the Coogee Courtyard Café, where Jake has spent a significant amount of time since moving to Sydney 10 years ago. So what were the key issues to consider prior to jumping into the business? "It's a great location opposite the hospital and I knew the light rail was coming soon," Jake responds.

In terms of Jake's involvement in the day-to-day running of the business, it varies between the footy season and the off-season. But he drops in regularly, and in the off-season that often means six out the six opening days each week. "They'll always find something for me to do when I'm here," he admits.

Enough talk about the café, let's talk footy. Jake arrived in Sydney as a fresh faced 17-year-old and admits that his first-grade debut against the Bulldogs in 2008 is one of the two major highlights of his career to-date. The other, of course, being the Roosters' 2013 NRL premiership.

The best player he's played against? Jonathan Thurston. The best he's played with? Well, one is Mitch Aubusson, "because you know he's going to turn up every day". And then there's Anthony Minichiello and Sonny Bill Williams. "They're professional, on and off the field. When you train with guys like that, it puts pressure on you to keep up with them," Jake says.

And what of the Roosters' two very contrasting past seasons? "In 2016, there were a few injuries and some off-field incidents that left a mark. There was a lack of professionalism at times," he says candidly.

And as for 2017, where the Roosters finished one game short? "2016 burnt a lot of us," Jake admits. "So we worked really hard in the pre-season and built up a good team morale. Luke Keary and Mick Gordon were also great additions to the team." And the goal for 2018? "To go one step further than 2017."

Are there any parallels between the business and footy? "You want to be surrounded by good people that enjoy coming to work and enjoy the vibe." In other words, you need good teamwork in both. "As much as you put in is as much as you get out of anything. If you cut at training or on the field or in the café, then you won't get the results."

"Growing up, I always liked cooking and always liked food, so when the opportunity came up I decided to have a crack at it,"

Image Courtesy of Cafe Reporter



KEN CALLANDER

By Tricia Duffield

“Back in the Sixties, you’d get 20,000 to the Saturday races and 15,000 to a Wednesday meet. The average Saturday crowd at Randwick was actually 27,000 – more than they were getting at the football.”

The magic of Ken Callander isn’t just his encyclopaedic knowledge of the horse racing game. It’s not only his larrikin attitude, his comic turn of phrase, or his refreshing authenticity in a world of polished fakery. It’s all of that, and more.

If you’ve ever had a flutter on the ponies in Australia, watched a Melbourne Cup or frocked up for a day at Royal Randwick, you would have had a dose of the Ken Callander charm. He’s been on our television screens for decades; bringing his inside information on who’s odds-on, in form and worth a punt.

Ken is from the sepia tones of the old media world, before media stars were launched overnight on social media and schooled in the sly art of digital fame. He uses slang, he swears, his suits are unfashionable. He’s not a pretty boy and he’s not a boy. He’s a bloke who’s doing his job because he lives and breathes it – and people respond to that. There’s nothing like seeing someone in their element.

Ken’s passion for the sport of kings was triggered by his auntie, an SP bookie every bit as colourful as her nephew. “My auntie was an SP bookie in the days before it was frowned upon,” he recalls. “In the 1950s, every suburb probably had half a dozen SP bookies. There was no TAB so they took bets from people in the neighbourhood and they paid them on the SP price, or the price in The Sydney Morning Herald. A lot of barbers were SP bookies, every pub had one, the police even used to bet with them.”

So with his interest sparked by his streetwise auntie, it didn’t take long for the young Ken to gravitate towards the racing game. He began his career as a copy boy at The Daily Telegraph

but his employers were good spotters of horseflesh themselves, and soon recognised the natural talent Ken had for reporting on the booming sport of horse racing.

His career flourished from the early 1960s and continues to this day – five decades, top of his game. “Back in the Sixties, you’d get 20,000 [people] to the Saturday races and 15,000 to a Wednesday meet. The average Saturday crowd at Randwick was actually 27,000 – more than they were getting at the football,” he recalls fondly.

“Racing was entertainment then, whereas now it’s just a revenue earner for the government. They’ve forgotten where the money comes from to keep the industry alive. It’s the little punter, and he’s not going to the races anymore because he’s not being looked after,” Ken says, matter of factly.

“Horse racing is part of the entertainment industry but it’s in danger of becoming a minor sport, with just a couple of meets as television extravaganzas and social events. You have to look after who pays the piper and that’s the punter.”

Ken’s tribe is that of the battlers. They’re from the same streets that he was from. He grew up in the tough outer Sydney suburb of Padstow and despite his illustrious career, hasn’t strayed far from the Padstow footpath. It’s understandable that Ken looks on the changes to the racing industry with some alarm as his tribe becomes more marginalised. The international nature of our biggest race meets, like the Melbourne and Caulfield Cups, and the focus on the horse breeding industry, not the punters, is fundamentally changing the sport, he says, and not for the better.

“Horse racing is part of the entertainment industry but it’s in danger of becoming a minor sport, with just a couple of meets as television extravaganzas and social events. You have to look after who pays the piper and that’s the punter.”



“Our horses are internationally known, and the international bloodlines can be transported from one country to the other pretty quickly these days,” he says. “Stallions service mares in both the northern and southern hemispheres, but breeders are in the business of making money for themselves. That’s not the racing industry, and I think sometimes people forget this, particularly when breeders are in such powerful positions in the industry.”

Ken argues the sport of gambling has also been marginalised in contemporary society. It’s fine to be a high roller at the casino and there’s no question gambling money is part of the economy, but Ken is the champion of the average small punter – and he says he’s the bloke who’s getting shortchanged and poor odds.

“Ninety-five percent of the people who bet at the races aren’t that interested in the lovely horses, they’re worried about how much money they’re going

to win, and I think our administrators need to make sure they don’t forget that because these are the people that are keeping the sport alive.”

Ken is quick to point out that he loves horses and the culture of racing beyond the bookies ring but that culture is dwindling. The demise of the bookie is one he regrets. “There’s only a handful of bookies at the races these days,” he observes. “And that’s a shame. I think racing has to be careful it doesn’t lose its place in the entertainment industry.”

Image courtesy of the Australian Turf Club Heritage Collection