The Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre

Surrounded by majestic grey gums, anchoring the civic area of Penrith, stands the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre - the only cultural centre in the world to be named after Australia’s most famous opera diva.

Long before the foundation stone was laid, Penrith supported a growing interest in the performing arts. Teachers and performers would travel from Sydney to conduct lessons or soirees in private homes.

In the early 1970s a group of local musicians and advocates including Allan Mullins, a surgeon with a huge passion for arts and a wonderful tenor voice; and Valda Silvy, still a central figure in the arts in Penrith, formed the Nepean District Musical Club and from St Mary’s Memorial Hall, music in the Penrith district flourished.

By the early 1980s student and audience numbers outstripped available rooms and a funding application for an acoustically designed and purpose-built musical performance centre and conservatorium was successful. The vision became reality and the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre opened for business in 1990.

Dame Joan Sutherland was the embodiment of the new centre’s aspirations; the highest calibre of artist and a passionate advocate for musical education and excellence.

*“I know how important it is for young people to be given every chance to develop their talents, and the Performing Arts Centre has superb teaching and performance facilities which will encourage their pursuit of excellence.”* – Dame Joan Sutherland

A community celebration in March 1990 officially opened the centre, with hundreds of locals joined by parachutists, marching bands, dancers and arts companies. Dame Joan and her husband, pianist Richard Bonynge added further ceremony with a gala performance later in the year.

In the decade following its opening, The Joan had become overwhelmed by demand for its teaching and performance spaces, and a major upgrade in 2005 increased its versatility and capacity.

The new improved Joan featured a 378-seat drama theatre - a home for the Q Theatre Company, which relocated after 27 years in its Railway Street location. To celebrate its new digs, the Q commissioned Tim Minchin and Kate Mulvany to write a musical specially for the region. The resulting work, *Somewhere,* celebrated the character of Penrith.

*“… a veritable passing parade of all that is Penrith - the Plaza, Panther's World of Entertainment, Mulgoa Road, Glenmore Park, the Nepean River, Krispy Kreme Doughnuts, the tank that Frank built at McDonald's - it has a ditty of its own - and the Q Theatre's evolution.”* – Sydney Morning Herald review

Today The Q continues to produce new work and to offer opportunities for artists and audiences, following the legacy of its founder Doreen Warburton, who dreamed of *“a theatre of passion and ideas, that cares deeply about the human condition and the future of our children”*.

The Joan, through its programs of music, theatre, comedy, dance, visual arts, community activities, music and theatre education - creativity in all its forms - continues to work to make this dream a reality, for a truly creative Penrith.