Womadelaide celebrates ten years next month and it is now a leading fixture on the city’s cultural calendar. So much so, in fact, that Premier Mike Rann recently negotiated keenly to keep the event in Adelaide despite counter bids from Sydney and Melbourne. Womad UK director Thomas Brooman drove a hard bargain - as well he might, to secure one of the more successful Womad festivals anywhere - by insisting that Adelaide become an annual occasion. It remains to be seen whether this will diminish the event and its support base or whether, based on the 1999 statistic, that 90% of the audience had been to Womad previously, enthusiastic recidivists will ensure that it becomes a once a year big day out for the over-35s.

In 2004 Womadelaide comes full circle. Established in 1992 for Rob Brookman’s Adelaide Festival of that year, it will again be incorporated into the program of the Adelaide Festival and organisers will be hoping that the 34% of the Womad audience who travelled from interstate and overseas in 2001 will, next year, stay around longer for some Festival and Fringe consumption as well.

Meanwhile, the 2003 anniversary Womadelaide is soon upon us and a reminder what a benefit it is that this event began under the auspices of an arts festival and not as a make-or-break commercial pop music venture. The subsidies, hidden and direct, have been substantial over the years and have given Womad a quality in organisation and production values which is hard to match. The Botanic Park location remains a huge asset, close to the city centre but offering vast Moreton Bay figs and a green sward during our driest season.

And because so many have attended Womad previously there are many ritualised aspects of the occasion. One step inside the perimeter and the layout is reassuringly familiar, the etiquette scrupulously intact, even the weather somehow manages to be predictably ideal with sunny days and softly balmy evenings (touch wood, we are nearly a month later this year.) You’d have to say, all things considered, it is a recipe guaranteed to rise every time.
Not surprisingly, after six Womadelaiden in eleven years, audiences have become familiar with a remarkable range of music. From the very first, Adelaide crowds have seen some of the very best, including the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Subramaniam, Youssou N'Dour and the Guo Brothers as well as pop luminaries such as Peter Gabriel and Crowded House. We have seen esoteric tuva vocalists, Sardinian folk groups, Cuban son-sters, klezmer exponents and duduk players. What used to be, unsatisfactorily, called World Music has now become music from around the world, a world now expanded to include the peripheries of Europe, Africa and Asia. There is still, perhaps, a tendency towards the exotic for its own sake, Womad as a sort of musical zoo, where the traditions, political context and cultural integrity of the material are at risk of being lost without translation and overshadowed by the festivity itself. South African performer Oliver Mtukudzi has reminded us about that in past Womad visits.

In 2001 there was an especially strong Australian component at Womadelaide and Rob Brookman made some stirring remarks about Reconciliation. Now, with international tensions as bad as they have been for twenty years, he notes that “more than 200 artists will come to us from some thirty countries and from an extraordinary array of cultural backgrounds, providing our audience with a taste of the riches our world holds beyond headlines of terror, sabre-rattling and cultural and religious intolerance.”

The diversity in this year’s program is undoubtedly impressive and it is hard to know where to start. Perhaps alphabetically is good. Sarod player Amjad Ali Khan promises much. Listening to a recent live recording of him playing accompanied by his two sons, I think finally we will have classical Indian music at Womad to rival the performances of Subramaniam back in 1992. Also from the Subcontinent are Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali, Sufi devotional singers in the tradition of all-time Womad favorite, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. In fact Rizwan and Muazzam are nephews of Nusrat and part of a line of qawwali (meaning ‘utterance’) that spans five centuries. Their debut RealWorld CD Sacrifice to Love is an indication that Womad qawwali is alive and well. They appear early on Friday night, in collaboration with UK dubmasters Temple of Sound, - one more good reason for being punctual.

Womad first introduced electronica in 1997 with the Afro Celt Sound System and the Birmingham Pakistani group Fun-da-Mental. This year Algerian beatster Rachid Taha will make an impact with his mix of Arabic, North African and pop techno idioms. Something for younger subscribers...
definitely - check out his *Made in Medina* CD for a magic carpet ride. Los de Abajo from Mexico are also mixing traditional melodies - this time salsa styles - with rap and punk rhythms and a hint of Ricky Martin. Their most recent CD, *Cybertropic Chilango Power*, is quite a party, released on David Byrne’s Luaka Bop label.

For a lively mix of Cuban, jazz and contemporary dance, Cachaito Lopez and his brilliant Cuban band are the ticket. Bass player for the legendary Buena Vista Social Club he has toured widely with both the Ibrahim Ferrer and Ruben Gonzalez bands as well. His debut solo CD *Cachaito* (World Circuit label) is a splendid mix of Cuban grooves and the sixties sounds of Pepper, Getz and even the more accessible side of Coltrane. Percussionist Miguel Anga Diaz is a miracle and the striding, vibrant suppleness of Lopez’ bass lines are hypnotic. He is seventy this year but Cachaito Lopez plays like a teenager. His set is a certain highpoint of the weekend.

The African program is always a dynamic part of the Womad festival and this year we have Burkina Faso percussion from Badenya les Freres Coulibaly, South African music and songs from storyteller Madosini, Ghanaian reggae from Papa Kwasi and the Iriehights and the Cuban influenced grooves of Senegal born Cheikh Lo whose CD *Ne La Thiass* (World Circuit) produced by Youssou N’Dour is reason enough for me to catch both his Saturday and Sunday performances.

In Womad 2001 Bob Brozman amply demonstrated his versatility, displaying blues, ragtime and Hawaiian styles on a variety of beautiful art deco steel bodied guitars. This time he duets with Takashi Hirayasu, an Okinawan musician with a pedigree in roots and rock music dating back to the 1970s. With Brozman he plays the sanshin, a traditional Okinawan three stringed banjo. Their CD *JinJin/Firefly* is a curious blend of sounds familiar and strange. It has grown on me greatly and the return this year of the hypermanic Brozman is bound to be a lively one.

I have always been a advocate of a strong Celtic contingent at Womad - because the music is so diverse and a reminder of our own links with worldwide idioms. Irish singer Cara Dillon brings a blend of traditional airs and contemporary acoustic settings in her widely praised eponymous debut CD. It is worth the price for the opening track alone - a lilting reading of *Black is the Colour*. She plays on Friday and early on Saturday afternoon. Also in Celtic mode are the jig and fiddle Scottish band
Shooglenifty. They created a happy ruckus back in 1997 and will again this time. My favourite CD of theirs is still *A Whiskey Kiss*. Also, Pelpeyu bring fiddles and bagpipes from Astarias in Northern Spain and Irish singer, now Melbourne resident, Andy White will perform.

The Indigenous Australian program is again strong this time. Singer songwriter Kerrianne Cox will feature as will the Keriba Wakai CASM Choir from Adelaide, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Inma women dancers and Torres Strait singer King Kadu. Also, Drum Drum from Fiji will open the card on Saturday.

The 2003 line-up is again large and various and takes a bit of navigation. Check the Womadelaide website - www.womadelaide.com.au - for more information. And to celebrate ten years of Womadelaide, a double CD has been released - one disc devoted to tracks from past favourites Nusrat, Papa Wemba, Ernest Ranglin, Afro Celt, Vika and Linda, Geoffrey Oryema, Peter Gabriel and others, the other is the 2003 program - Los de Abajo, Cheikh Lo, King Kadu, Cara Dillon, Cachaito Lopez, Rachid Taha, Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali and more. It is available at Big Star and other stores. Womadelaide runs from 7-9 March.