

Carols by Candlelight

Christmas traditions in Australia, like Christmas in New Zealand, have many similarities to British, Irish, American and Canadian traditions, including traditional Christmas symbols featuring winter iconography. This means a red fur-coated Father Christmas or Santa Claus riding a sleigh, songs such as "Jingle Bells", and various Christmas scenes on Christmas cards and decorations. However, the timing of Christmas occurring during the Southern Hemisphere's summer season has resulted in the development of some local traditions as a result of the warmer weather.

Carols by Candlelight is an annual Australian Christmas tradition that was popularised in Melbourne in 1938. The tradition has since spread around the world. It involves people gathering, usually outdoors in a park, to sing carols by candlelight, featuring live performances by both national and international celebrities accompanied by a symphony orchestra

Carols by Candlelight, held in Melbourne, Victoria, was introduced in 1938 by radio announcer Norman Banks, of Melbourne radio station 3KZ. Whilst walking home from his night-time radio shift on Christmas Eve in 1937, he passed a window and saw an elderly woman sitting up in bed inside listening to *Away in a Manger* being played on the radio and singing along with her face being lit by candlelight. Wondering how many others spent Christmas alone, he had the idea to gather a large group of people to all sing Christmas carols together by candlelight. The first ever event was held in Alexandra Gardens the following Christmas in 1938, and was attended by around 10,000 people.

Following World War II, the Carols became so well patronised that the decision was made to move it to the neighbouring park in King's Domain. In 1959, the newly constructed Sidney Myer Music Bowl provided a permanent venue, where they are still held 60 years on as of 2019.

Funds raised from donations, ticket, and candle sales are given to Vision Australia (formerly the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, (RVIB)). However, originally, all profits went to the Austin Hospital. During World War II the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund joined the Austin Hospital as co-recipients, and in the immediate post-war era the RVIB received funds, as did the Austin Hospital.

In recent years, the dress rehearsal on 23 December has become open to the public. Tickets to the event are cheaper than the main event, while funds raised still go towards Vision Australia. The event has become almost as popular as the main event in recent years.

Christmas Eve 2017 marked the 80th anniversary of the event.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Vision Australia announced that there would be no crowds for their annual event in 2020, it was the first time this had ever happened. In November 2021, it was announced crowds will return for the 2021 event, however all attendees (10,000 people) will need to have had the COVID vaccination.