

Happy Birthday SHRI MATAJI NIRMALA DEVI 103 YEARS

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Former Bluesfest co-owner Kevan Oxford and his wife Karin Woods at Scotts Head, NSW; below, from left, Jimmy Barnes performing at Bluesfest; 'godfather of soul' James Brown during his headlining set in 2004; crowds at the Byron Bay festival; and, bottom right, former Bluesfest commercial business manager Mark Pope



Australian promoter who had put up a tour together in Europe where we were supposed to make \$60,000 and the guy just ripped us off." Jordan alleged. "If it wasn't for me taking over the reins halfway through the tour and picking up the rest of the cash, nobody would have gotten paid."

The US artist declined an interview request for this article but an intermediary told The Australian: "I believe both Cyril and his attorney feel the less said about Peter Noble the better." The Australian has not been able to verify Jordan's claim.

Noble also has been accused by industry figures of misleading fans when, on August 14, 2024, he announced Bluesfest was going to end in 2025, before successfully applying for state government grants in an attempt to ensure the festival's survival.

"As much as it pains me to say this, it's time to close this chapter," said Noble in a press statement at the time. "As I said earlier this year, at Bluesfest 2024, next year's festival will be happening and it definitely is, but it will be our last."

Within a matter of months, he was changing his tune by subtly tweaking his language.

Two months later, on October 17, Noble told a federal parliamentary inquiry into the live music industry that Bluesfest was the "most highly awarded event in the history of Australia" and "I brought over \$1m into the state of NSW" in the past 12 years from international and local visitors going to the festival.

"Of that \$1m, \$440m was apparently spent, according to the economic impact reports, in the Byron Shire, going into winter," Noble said.

Noble had commissioned Queensland-based company Laurence Consulting in the past to measure the financial impact of the festival with a report stating that it pumped more than \$230m into the NSW economy in 2024.

"When we said, with Bluesfest, 'This just might be the last one' — all of a sudden we're selling more tickets than we have since 2022, when it all opened up after Covid," Noble told the standing committee on communications and the arts, chaired by MP Brian Mitchell.

Gig-goers, said Noble, are "going to sit on that money unless you find a way to make them spend it." Hey, it's Taylor Swift coming, it's Cold Chisel's tour — which is once every five or 10 years — or Bluesfest might just be ending."

"You've got to do that to get people to then get to the point where we're 80 per cent sold out," he said. "With 80,000 entries [in 2025], we're looking at adding another day. It's what you've got to do in marketing. And we made very sure that underneath that we said, 'We don't want this to be the last festival, we're doing everything we can for it not to be.'"

"But, in the end, that's the sort of stuff you've got to do nowadays — and is that right? Is that night, in terms of people having to be coerced to spend their money?"

Speaking with The Australian in December 2024 — when it was revealed that the festival would not be ending in 2025 after all — Noble said he was applying for government grants to get enough money to secure two or three headliner events every year, and he was able to trade profitably, and continue to bring \$100-plus million into this state of NSW.

"I mean, why wouldn't that be a no-brainer?" he asked.

But Noble did not get what he wanted. Documents obtained by The Australian through a Freedom of Information application show that Noble sought \$500,000 last year, but received only \$250,000. Only one of three assessors for the contemporary music festival viability fund, overseen by Sound NSW, supported the festival's funding request. The assessors' comments were redacted from documents seen by The Australian.

In total, Bluesfest has in recent years received \$6m of federal and state funding, according to the LinkedIn profile of former Bluesfest chief operating officer and chief events officer Nadja Kozietzka. Kozietzka declined The Australian's request for an interview.

Noble who toured the world as a boss player in the 1960s before becoming a concert promoter, said in his 2025 self-published autobiography, called *Winners Never Quit*, that bad behaviour was commonplace in the industry in the 1960s.

"The Australian way of doing business in these days didn't have much decorum about it," he wrote. "It was all about these guys coming in and being big and Neanderthal and yelling and screaming and thinking that was the way to make other people defer to them. It was this peak mentality over who was the Alpha, and it was really awful to see."

"But having said that, I must admit that I did take it on a bit too. I thought, 'This must be how

you do business.' I'm glad to say that, for the most part, that way of doing business doesn't occur anymore."

This was not the experience of Woods, who worked as festival co-ordinator and general office manager for 15 years. She is married to Oxford, and the pair co-founded the event in 1990 with a friend, Dan Doepel. Woods kept contemporary notes, journaling and contemporaneous notes, including repeated patterns of intimidation, verbal abuse and unprofessional behaviour.

She briefed The Australian on the contents of the notes in an interview in January, and claimed Noble's interactions with her "were frequently demanding and threatening in tone."

"He sought to impose his will and, when challenged, would make circumstances deliberately difficult for those who disagreed

"The experience of the staff is so horrific, in order to try and create this nice experience for people. At what cost is that happening?"

FORMER BLUESFEST EMPLOYEE

with him," she alleged. "I observed a pattern in which he appeared particularly comfortable intimidating women; behaviour I witnessed on numerous occasions. As a woman operating in the music industry at that time, I was required to assert myself consistently in order to be heard and respected. Peter's conduct was therefore especially confronting and infuriating."

It reached boiling point on Tuesday April 6, 2004, according to Woods. The Australian has seen photographs of the injuries to Oxford, date stamped April 6, 2004. Oxford confirmed to The Australian that he called local police and two officers attended the Bluesfest office. Noble was not present. Oxford and Noble did not press charges.

After staging the 2004 Bluesfest, Oxford ended the partnership and Woods ceased working at the festival.

Noble has been the event's sole owner from 2009 to last week, when his role as Bluesfest director ended once he signed an ASIC report to wind up his company, which was placed into liquidation.

Since 2019, Noble has been married to his Indonesia-born wife, Dyah, whose background is in advertising; they met in 2017.

According to written witness accounts from Oxford, Bluesfest ticketing supervisor Kim Smith, bar and liquor manager Kurt Hansen and festival transport co-ordinator William Milroy, Noble launched himself at Oxford.

Smith said in her account that she heard Noble arguing loudly with Woods. "He was using abusive and obscene language and screamed: 'Get out of my office now, f---ing c...'" she wrote.

Smith claimed she saw the pair go outside and get into a physical altercation. This was also seen by Hansen.

"I saw Peter move towards Kevan and push him into a car that was behind him," alleges Hansen in his account, seen by The Australian. "Kevan straightened his hand and Peter pushed his hands into Kevan's face, ripping off his glasses. Both Kevan and Peter then wrestled. Peter started to throw swinging punches, some of

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to the ground. I heard him say, 'Stop this shit because someone gets hurt.' I saw Kevan Oxford get up from the ground followed by Peter Noble."

Smith wrote that Oxford came into the office "with blood on his face". The Australian has seen photographs of the injuries to Oxford, date stamped April 6, 2004. Oxford confirmed to The Australian that he called local police and two officers attended the Bluesfest office. Noble was not present. Oxford and Noble did not press charges.

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According to his autobiography, the guest list at their wedding included country music star Casey Chambers — who performed a song named For Better Or Worse, which she dedicated to the couple — and Arts Minister Tony Burke.

Noble has children from earlier relationships. He splits his time between a home at Lennox Head, about 18km south of Byron Bay, which property records show that he bought for \$825,000 in 1999, and Ball, where he owns a villa and has said in previous interviews that he likes to visit several times a year.

Until now, both Oxford and Woods have declined comment on what happened on that day in 2004.

"I would have done it get even if Peter abused and got me into public — but people were scared back then," Oxford told The Australian.

"He didn't want to end up in court and paying lawyers money that they could defend themselves if they were one story. That's the reality."

Oxford said in an email to The Australian that the couple decided

other factors.

Mr Clare said he wants to make the education system "better and fairer for every child".

"We know that boys generally do better in maths, and girls do better with reading," he said.

"More girls finish high school than boys. More women enrol in university than men, and more men enrol in TAFE and in apprenticeships than women."

Mr Clare said high school completion rates had been "going in the wrong direction for close to a decade" when Labor came to power in 2022.

It will identify "potential evidence-based solutions" to help struggling students — including the old-school teaching method of "explicit instruction", a use of artificial intelligence (AI), changes to the curriculum and teaching children to read and write by sounding out the phonetic construction of words.

The feminisation of the teaching profession may also be flagged as a reason for boys' growing disengagement with school.

Women account for 80 per cent of primary school teachers and 60 per cent of high school teachers, with more men shunning the profession over the past 20 years.

Mr Clare called for bipartisan support to improve Australia's education system, which left at least one in three teenage boys and a quarter of girls unable to read to baseline levels in Year 9 last year.

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