

# STRIKING A CHORD

Tania de Jong knows how to use her voice to help others find theirs.

Raised in a family of classic overachievers (her grandmother invented the first folding umbrella in Vienna and her mother competed at Wimbledon), Tania de Jong had big female role models right under her nose. She says that her entrepreneurial streak is because of this.

"My brother and I put on magic shows at home and charged admission. At 12 years old, I started my first business selling shells and gem stone jewellery I was making in the driveway," she said. After that, Tania started a tennis coaching business and singing teaching school.

"When I was 14, one of my school friends told me I shouldn't bother having singing lessons as I wasn't good enough," she said.

Rather than discouraging her, this fuelled her to pursue voice training with increased vigour. This led to the formation of opera/music theatre singing group Pot-Pourri who have been performing around the world at conferences, special events, festivals and major venues for the past 28 years.

"Lots of people are told they can't sing early in life and their voices are silenced. Unfortunately we tend to be a judgemental society. In countries like Fiji, Vanuatu, Africa and Italy, everyone sings in their community. There's no such thing as tone deaf."

"We are all creative, everyone can sing and find their voice; not just their singing voice, but their meaning and purpose in life. People just need to be empowered," said de Jong.

She says that it's not just about feeling good when you sing; it's about what happens in your brain.

"Due to the neuroplasticity of the brain, singing is actually healing. It makes you smarter, healthier, happier and more creative. And when you sing with others, it's even

more powerful."

Because of this, de Jong has started numerous business devoted to singing, the voice, as well as creativity and innovation. Her first business in this industry was Pot-Pourri, then MTA Entertainment and Events, then two charities – The Song Room and Creativity Australia – and finally, Creative Universe which is an umbrella company delivering leadership development, creative thinking and innovation capability building. Tania presents keynotes around the world at conferences and special events on entrepreneurship, creativity, disruption, innovation, social inclusion and leadership.

She also runs the Creative Innovation Global conference that will be held at the Sofitel Melbourne On Collins from 7-9 November, 2016. The theme for this year's conference is 'The Exponential Shift: Making Transformation Happen'.

A new project is Dimension 5, a creative innovation co-working space where she is hoping to help foster what she calls 'positive human collisions'. De Jong is passionate about encouraging people to get out and meet people from other industries, walks of life and social classes.

She said, "We hang out with people who are like us, dress like us and think like us. This will never lead to creativity. My work is about breaking down silos which leads to greater innovation. Figuratively, the robots are coming so human beings need to unlock much more of their innate creativity before it's too late."

Her final project – for the time being – is to grow her not-for-profit organisation Creativity Australia's Sing For Good online video singing event which encourages workplaces, families and groups to sing and support those in need.

Tania's mission is to change the world, one voice at a time. ■

