Ever since the success of the play and movie Amadeus by Sir Peter Levin Shaffer, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his music has become a major subject of interest in popular culture. In the last few years I have come across three books which make mention of Mozart thus providing the reader with the opportunity to reflect and appreciate the phenomenon of this composer.

Firstly, Don Campbell in his best-selling book The Mozart Effect has presented the case that classical music or western 'art' music -especially the music of Mozart has a great impact on the intellectual development of young children, particularly babies. Campbell, a musician and composer and former student of Nadia Boulanger, provides many examples and approaches to prove his hypothesis. On his website http://www.mozarteffect.com/ Campbell states:

By listening to the music of Mozart it will increase verbal, emotional, and spatial intelligence; improves memory and the ability to concentrate; enhances ‘right-brain’ creative processes; and strengthens intuitive thinking skills.

Although these findings have some supportive evidence, there has also been research to disprove Campbell’s theories. Nevertheless it is still important to consider that this idea revolutionised how classical music has been marketed for young babies and toddlers. Campbell’s
work launched a sudden increase of products for children playing Mozart's music as well as the music of Bach and Beethoven. There have been DVDs, musical toys and mobiles for new parents to purchase as well as concerts available for young children to attend in the hope that the music of these innovative composers will enhance the development of these young minds and build future audiences for classical western 'art' music.

Malcolm Gladwell in his fascinating book Outliers discusses the idea of success and particularly of genius versus opportunity. What is interesting about Gladwell’s theory is that he suggests Mozart may not have been the genius we all suspected but it was opportunity and environment that created this musical phenomenon. Gladwell explains through a number of scenarios that it takes 10,000 hours to achieve mastery of a particular skill and/or subject and provides Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as an interesting case study. According to Gladwell, Mozart started composing at age eleven, and it wasn’t until he was in his early twenties that the composer achieved the accolades for his compositions.

The main issues that Gladwell reflects include: ‘How long do you have to work at something until you have achieved excellence’. As mentioned he suggests that the 10,000 hours is what it takes and indicates that it can take up to 10 years to achieve this. Other issues that come to play include ‘cultural legacy’. It is well documented that Mozart’s father was a renowned violin teacher and gave his son his musical education. Gladwell goes on to quote Michael Howe from his book Genius Explained:

- by the standards of mature composers, Mozart’s early works are not outstanding. The earliest pieces were all probably written down by his father, and perhaps improved in the process. Many of Wolfgang’s childhood compositions, such as the first seven of his concertos for piano and orchestra, are largely arrangements of works by other composers.

This idea can be contested given the violin concertos were composed prior to the Piano Concerto K271 and represent some of Mozart’s most sublime music.

Another reference to the revered composer in contemporary popular culture is in the book Mozart in the Jungle by oboist and journalist Blair Tindall. Ms Tindall was a freelance oboist in New York working as a regular casual player with the New York Philharmonic. The reference to Mozart is merely for effect as Ms Tindall shares the world of classical music to which audiences are often not always privy.

On reflection we know that Mozart had many personal and professional challenges to overcome throughout his life. Maybe Tindall’s book helps us to remember that a career in classical music can be both a demanding and rewarding path to choose. These few examples are only a small sample of the material available that make reference to Mozart in popular culture and I am sure this brilliant composer will be the subject of many further discussions and essays to come.
Dimity Hall and Mozart

Australia Ensemble @UNSW violinist Dimity Hall was kind enough to share some of her thoughts on performing the two Mozart works which will be featured in this concert series.

Dimity stated that “performing Mozart is always challenging; we have lived with these works over many years, but still one works especially hard to make sure the music is ‘just right’. The String Quintet in G minor has many highlights, not least of which is the beautiful sonority created by the two violas, but one of my personal favourites is the slow introduction to the last movement which is relatively solemn and reflective, but which then leads into an incredibly joyous and uplifting finale, bursting with optimism.”

On the Piano Quartet in E flat, Dimity said:

“This is a wonderful work, and of the two piano quartets, this is the one I prefer to play. I think it’s a little more democratically written and the slow movement is glorious. It is often the case where the piano quartets are not performed quite as often as say, the piano trios or the string quartets, as they usually require a guest artist. In the Australia Ensemble we have a flexible permanent line-up which provides us with the opportunity to play these extraordinary works with performers who thoroughly know and understand each others’ playing.”

Hear the music

Mozart: Piano Quartet K493
Ian Munro, piano; Dimity Hall, violin; Irina Morozova, viola; Julian Smiles, cello
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday May 13, 1.10pm
Leighton Hall
Free, all welcome

Mozart: String Quintet K516
Dene Olding, Dimity Hall, violins; Irina Morozova, Yvette Goodchild, violas; Julian Smiles, cello
Subscription concert 3, 2014
Saturday May 17, 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium

p: +61 2 9385 4874
Andrew Barnes - Guest Artist

Andrew Barnes, Senior Lecturer in Bassoon at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, is a regular guest artist with the Australia Ensemble and his beautiful playing will feature in the premiere of Ian Munro’s Divertissement sur le nom d’Erik Satie for piano and wind quintet this May.

I recently chatted with Andrew about his association with the Australia Ensemble and he was generous with his time to answer a few questions and share his enthusiasm for the Munro work in its new revised version.

JD: How long have you been playing with the Australia Ensemble as a guest artist?

AB: I started this position at the Conservatorium in September 2002. The first year I played with the Australia Ensemble was 2005. I have played with the ensemble for eight years.

JD: Did you start in the position at the Conservatorium after you had graduated from the University of Indiana, Bloomington?

AB: I was teaching in Bloomington (Indiana University) and at that point had been there for three years, between 1998 and 2002. Prior to this I had been working as a bassoonist in a full-time position with the Adelaide Symphony.

JD: Are you originally from Sydney?

AB: I was born in Auckland, New Zealand.

Andrew also made the interesting point that another New Zealander, Gordon Skinner had previously held the position of Lecturer in Bassoon at the Sydney Conservatorium.

JD: Why do you enjoy playing with the Australia Ensemble? When invited to play with the Ensemble, what aspect of performing with them motivates you to say ‘yes’ to each call? Why do you make performing in the Australia Ensemble a priority?

AB: First and foremost it is the interpersonal relationships with the musicians. As a wind player I grew up listening to the likes of Geoff and Cathy and had always admired their playing. The opportunity to play with people of that calibre is one that must be seized. The Australia Ensemble is an interesting combination of each person having their own unique and amazing technical abilities plus the musical interchange that comes about in the group. It feels like a real collaboration between all of the people playing rather than one person, say a conductor, making all the important decisions. The oboe personnel has changed quite a lot from concert to concert but playing with Geoff, Rob and Cathy for the last eight years has kept the core of the wind quintet fairly consistent and allowed a great rapport to develop.

The programs have also been very interesting, innovative and nicely put together. In addition, you often have the opportunity to play works that you may not get to play in your own wind quintet. For example, works such as the Munro in May and the Rubenstein- which we are going to be doing at the end of the year - are not regularly performed. The Munro - I can’t wait to do this work! I have heard the string version with piano. I was just sitting there listening to it one day thinking this would be amazing with winds. I talked with Ian after hearing the string performance and he said “well, actually I did do a wind version”.

JD: Music is not the easiest of professions - what inspires you as a musician? And most importantly, to keep going forward as a musician?

AB: I have struggled with that concept and actually the wisest words came from my partner who is a health care professional. I have always thought ‘all I am doing is playing music, I am not actually saving anyone’s life – that’s what is really important’. And my partner one day said: ‘What I do is keeping people alive and what you are doing is making life worthwhile’.

And actually it is such a simple thing... there is something about sound, and the way that - I am going to bring it back to the winds again and working with Cathy and Geoff - there is a great relationship with how sound works and the way
you play with certain people. I think I actually played with Cathy first, through the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Our sounds since that time have always worked and felt comfortable together. It is as if our sounds transcend the individual parts and become something more. I think it important for students that you are teaching to hear what you are doing. Important in that you are under that pressure and can stress the importance to drill the breath support required, all those things about embouchure and all those little corners required for public performance. If you are just doing it as a warm up in your room you forget how important it is to know these things and practice these skills in a performance situation.

Every time I come out of a week playing with the Ensemble it is like a ‘splash in the face’, a reminder of what is required to create a good live performance. With teaching it is tempting to teach new pieces to the students all the time - because you have drilled the foundation skills so many times with so many students that you may not want to do it again. However, the students need to do the foundation work all the time, and playing in the Ensemble refreshes this idea.

JD: Is it then the practical experience that is important, how it feels to be a performer, and it being your job to help them (the students) on that road to this goal?

AB: Yes, as there are too many little corners that you can forget if you are not dealing with performance under pressure.

JD: Who inspired you as an emerging artist?

AB: My parents, who gave me the confidence to give anything a go and supported me in any way they could. My parents come to every Australia Ensemble concert and most nights Mum bakes fresh cookies for all the players! Mum is an artist and a potter. My Dad still plays in the Sydney Mandolin orchestra at the age of 83 and he has been a singer all his life. I was surrounded by people that appreciated music. My teacher John Cran inspired me as a young musician. From the age of 6 I lived in Sydney. Because I didn’t study music formally at the Conservatorium or the Conservatorium High School, I wasn’t constantly surrounded by the staff at the Conservatorium. However, it was the students around me, my peers in the Sydney Youth Orchestra who provided inspiration. My music career just happened. I never intended to be a musician at first. I studied Economics/Law at Macquarie (University) and after graduation started working with a large accounting firm. What inspired me to give music a go was being awarded the Queen Elisabeth Trust Grant which provided me with an amazing opportunity. As it happened I remember the partner at the accounting firm saying ‘If I was you I would take this opportunity, don’t even look back- just go and do it - you can always come back to this’.

JD: What excites you about the Munro ‘Divertissement’?

AB: For me to work on a piece that I have heard and just immediately reacted to - in terms of how a wonderful piece of music the Munro work is - and to then be able to present the premiere of the wind version is exciting. In addition, it is great to be part of the process in generating a new work.

JD: What aspect of the piece is most interesting to work with?

AB: How the writing will change from the strings to the winds. For example, the cello writing and how it transfers to the bassoon. Ian had asked me if I was able to perform the work on a French bassoon but I’d need a year or two advance notice to get that up and ready for public consumption!

Andrew explained that in the French bassoon, the bore - which is the interior chamber of the bassoon - is shaped differently and thus produces a lighter and vibrant sound compared to the German bassoon. Andrew says that he does own a French bassoon but it needs some major work done on the instrument in order to bring it back to its former glory. However, he will emulate the sound and colours of the French bassoon in the performance of Ian Munro’s work which I certainly look forward to hearing in the next subscription concert.

Hear the music

**Munro: Divertissement sur le nom d’Erik Satie**
- new version for piano and wind quintet
Ian Munro, piano; Geoffrey Collins, flute; Huw Jones, oboe; David Griffiths, clarinet; Robert Johnson, horn; Andrew Barnes, bassoon

**Subscription concert 3, 2014**
Saturday May 17, 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
p: +61 2 9385 4874
His Master’s Voice

Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern were all composers of the Second Viennese School, which was a new wave of composition that emerged in the early part of the twentieth century. Webern and Berg were close friends and both dedicated students of Schoenberg. There is no doubt that classical western ‘art’ music has been shaped by the music and innovations of these three composers and this month the Australia Ensemble will perform Berg’s Adagio and the Kammersymphonie Op.9 of Arnold Schoenberg, though not in its original form but the arrangement for small ensemble by Anton Webern.

Schoenberg’s teaching of counterpoint and rigorous analysis of form, coupled with his preoccupation with suppressing repetition, found a place in the compositional ideals of both Berg and Webern. This is clearly explained by Leibowitz in his book Schoenberg and His School:

‘Step by step, Berg and Webern follow the evolution of their master; as soon as he penetrates into a new realm the two disciples follow him there immediately. But, while the genius of Berg always strove to establish a connection between the discoveries of Schoenberg and the past - thus profiting by the ‘retroactive’ elements in Schoenberg’s work – the genius of Webern is concerned with the possibilities of the future inherent in this work, and thus succeed in projecting its particular novel and radical elements.’

Schoenberg’s students admired his intellect and teaching methods but his dominant personality meant relationships he had with his students were not always easy. In his book Arnold Schoenberg, Egon Wellesz (also a student of Schoenberg) stated:

‘… Schoenberg had a great talent for teaching; he is stimulating and effective. There is scarcely one of his many pupils who has not succumbed to the charm of his personality. An entire contrast to that of many instructors who regard their work merely as a means of obtaining a livelihood, Schoenberg’s life is full of thought for his pupils. Regardless of the rest of the world, he gives them freely of all that he has conceived, and draws from them whatever latent capability they may possess.’

Berg studied with Schoenberg for a considerable length of time (1904-1911), initially taking theory and counterpoint and from 1907, composition as well. Webern was a student of Schoenberg for a shorter period, commencing his formal study in 1904 and finishing in 1908, during which time Schoenberg wrote some of his most important works, including the first Quartet (1905), Kammersymphonie Op.9 (1906) and second Quartet (1908-9). In March 1913, Schoenberg and his former students presented an infamous concert for the Wiener Konzertverein (Vienna Concert Society). The program included

An anonymous caricature picture of the 'Skandalkonzert' of 1913.
Schoenberg's Kammersymphonie Op.9, Berg's Five Orchestral Songs on Postcard Text of Peter Altenberg, Op.4 (Altenberg Lieder) and Webern's Six Pieces op. 6 for Orchestra. The concert became known as the 'Skandalkonzert' as the audience rioted in protest to the music performed. Schoenberg wished to perform Mahler's Kindertotenlieder (Songs on the Death of Children) in the program but due to rioting the concert was not able to continue.

Although not immune to Schoenberg's sometimes erratic behaviour, Webern had a close relationship with his teacher and when Schoenberg moved to Mödling, moved to the same region. However, it was Berg that seemed to suffer from Schoenberg's constant criticism and advice. Berg worked very hard for his former teacher, arranging and managing Schoenberg's financial affairs, and like Webern, spent time copying his teacher's music works in preparation for performance. Although Berg learned much from Schoenberg and was instrumental in keeping the older composer financially organised, he never seemed to have the closeness that appeared to exist between Webern and Schoenberg and the relationship was often strained. After the 1913 Skandalkonzert where Berg's beautiful first work Altenberg Lieder was performed, Schoenberg met with Berg to discuss the piece. Berg biographer and editor Douglas Jarman writes: In the wake of public reaction, Schoenberg's criticism provoked a crisis of confidence and destroyed what was left of Berg's belief in the Altenberg songs: “My self doubt,' he wrote Schoenberg, 'is so strong that the least criticism from you, who alone are qualified to give it, robs me of almost all hope'. Although the relationship between the two men did change in the 1920s to become more collegial, the outcome of this earlier incident meant that these songs were never performed a second time or published during Berg's lifetime.

Schoenberg biographer, musicologist and pianist Dika Newlin was a student of the much older Schoenberg in California. Newlin was a prodigious talent and studied with Schoenberg from a very young age, keeping a diary of her lessons and associations. As a result of her work with Schoenberg, Newlin spent her life championing the music of her teacher as well as the other composers from the second Viennese School through her performances and writing. To close, Newlin perfectly summarised Schoenberg’s relationship with Berg and Webern in her book Schoenberg Remembered: “That a majority of Schoenberg pupils looked up to him as a super-Father-Figure – maybe even quasi-divine? They were over-awed by him, while often resentful of the “thought control” which he exercised over them. For proof, read the letters of Alban Berg to his wife, especially those in which he discussed the problems Webern experienced in trying to break away from Schoenberg’s overwhelming influence. How to avoid being artistically paralysed by Schoenberg yet at the same time not to reject him – it is a conflict that we all went through!"

Sadly both Webern and Berg died in tragic circumstances before their mentor but like Schoenberg their influence and music have left an important legacy for future compositional innovations and directions in western ‘art’ music. For more information on Schoenberg one can access the website: http://www.schoenberg.at/
Mozart Arranged

CD release for the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

ABC Classics has recently re-released some recordings of Mozart classics by the Australia Ensemble, originally recorded in 1992 by the four string players of the Ensemble (Dene Olding, Dimity Hall, violins; Irina Morozova, viola; Julian Smiles, cello) with guest artists Hartmut Lindemann (viola) and David Pereira (cello).

The CD set titled Mozart Arranged includes some classic works by Mozart in different formats. The wonderful Sinfonia Concertante KV364 for violin and viola with orchestra is arranged for string sextet, as the Grand Sextet Concertante. Mozart’s clarinet quintet and horn quintet have each been arranged for string quintet and present a different perspective on the original format.

Recently reviewed by Limelight Magazine, ‘these well-played and recorded performances make fine comparative examples of some well-known chamber music.’

The first CD in the set includes arrangements of Mozart’s solo piano sonatas for two pianos by Edvard Grieg and performed by Daniel Herscovitch and Julie Adam.

The CD is available for purchase through ABC Classics: ABC 481 0853.

A great Exodus

On Sunday June 1 at 5pm, members of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW will be performing with the Collegium Musicum Choir for the first concert of the 2014 choral program, presenting Handel’s magnificent oratorio Israel in Egypt. The 80 voices of the Collegium Musicum under the direction of Sonia Maddock will perform with a professional orchestra, led by Dimity Hall, and are joined by young soloists Maia Andrews (soprano), Sarah Ampil (soprano), Kyla Allan (alto), Joel Scott (tenor), Alexander Knight (bass) and Harrison Collins (bass). This oratorio, written in 1739, is largely scored for double chorus and tells the Biblical story of Moses leading the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt by parting the Red Sea, and taking them to safety. Much of the action is told by the choir, with very few recitatives, and a handful of colourful arias and duets. It is a vibrant and celebratory work in the great Baroque oratorio tradition. Subscribers of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW are again offered a 15% discount on pre-booked tickets:

Handel: Israel in Egypt
Sunday June 1, 2014 at 5pm
Collegium Musicum Choir (Sonia Maddock, director);
Collegium Musicum Orchestra (Dimity Hall, concertmaster)
Maia Andrews, Sarah Ampil, sopranos; Kyla Allan, alto;
Joel Scott, tenor; Alexander Knight, Harrison Collins, basses
Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW
Adult $24 Senior $21 Concession $18 - series tickets available
15% DISCOUNT ON PRE-BOOKED TICKETS FOR AUSTRALIA ENSEMBLE SUBSCRIBERS