



AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Never Stand Still

Music Performance Unit

May Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday May 19, 2015
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Butterley: *The wind stirs gently*
Beethoven: Piano Trio in B flat
Golijov: *K'vakarat*
Martinu: Sonata

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour workshop
Thursday May 21, 2015
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Geoffrey Collins, flute and Sue Healey, choreographer discuss Thea Musgrave's *Narcissus*
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 3, 2015
Saturday May 23, 2015
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Musgrave: *Narcissus*
Bruch: Movements from *Eight pieces*
Butterley: *Spindles of the Stars*
Beethoven: *Piano trio Op.70 no.1 'The Ghost'*

Collegium Musicum Choir
Sunday May 31, 2015 at 5pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Schubert: *Magnificat*
Mozart: *Vesperae solennes de confessore KV339*
Haydn: *Theresienmesse Hob. XXII:12*

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Reflections on music and dance

Narcissus has been living (or not) for thousands of years with what must be one of history's worst reputations. A combination of Rousseau's Noble Savage (albeit a better than average looking one) and Wagner's Parsifal, Narcissus ended up dying because he couldn't cope with his own beauty, which he didn't realise was actually his own reflection.

'Narcissism' is one in a sequence of strictly clinically terms to enable psychiatrists to diagnose and treat specific symptoms, but which has strayed, for better or worse, into common parlance where it is used as a sort of shorthand to describe behaviour disapproved by the speaker. Clinically, it 'indicates' an individual whose behaviour reveals excessive self-preoccupation, self-interest and sense of entitlement to the point where these character traits impinge destructively on social, personal and professional interaction and create dysfunctional situations and relationships.



In past popular usage, 'narcissistic' simply meant 'physically vain'. It is one thing to associate your name with prancing super models sashaying down catwalks, or doe-eyed members of boy bands gazing at their Ralph Lauren loafers

Sue Healey (above) is choreographing a solo work for dancer Raghav Handa (below left) to perform with a filmed version of himself, and flautist Geoffrey Collins

through their luxuriant fringes; but to be held responsible for an entire generation as they bore fellow commuters rigid with loud, vapid and interminable mobile phone conversations or become transfixed by their own perfect tattooed musculatures in the floor length mirrors in the weight training section of every gym, is another thing altogether.

The Australia Ensemble is paying homage to Narcissus in a work by the Scottish (but long-resident in the US) composer Thea Musgrave. The repertoire isn't exactly bursting with works for solo flute: Debussy wrote one, *Syrinx*, another mythological creature, but it lasts all of three minutes!

Thea Musgrave's fourteen minute piece, composed in 1987, is predominantly lyrical but depicts Narcissus in a gamut of emotions: successively curious at the first sight of his reflection, then intrigued, frightened, contemplative, playful, confused, agitated and finally uncontrollably enraged.

The Australia Ensemble's performance embodies the spirit of what Wagner described in one of those uniquely grandiose Teutonic compound nouns, Gesamtkunst, or artistic synthesis or fusion. Now we simply call it multi-media.

Not surprisingly, Geoffrey Collins, the Australia Ensemble's long-standing flautist is the instrumental soloist, with Sue Healey (choreographer), Raghav Handa (dancer), Ben Carey (sound technician) and Gordon Rymer (production manager).

Discussing the work, Geoffrey said, "The skill with which the composer has integrated digital delay, (not just as an 'effect' which can be rather obvious and quickly tedious) is what makes the work such a success in my view.

"*Narcissus* is not just a sonic experience (solo flute plus digital delay). The composer's suggestion in the score for the possibility of Narcissus being further mirrored via dance has added a new dimension to the experience and inspired us.

"The choreographer has come up with just one dancer, dancing with his own 'reflection', which will be a video projection onto a suspended screen.

"It guides the listener through Narcissus' ultimately tragic journey and brings the story alive... discovery, enchantment, frustration, torment and ultimate destruction are all conveyed through the imitation of water reflections.

"The work was written quite a long time ago in technological terms and the original 'hardware' digital delay box has long been superseded by modern technology and is now controlled by computer software.

"I use a foot pedal which triggers 37 separate cues to the software, with a technician handling some of the effects.

"My special thanks go to Ben Carey (UNSW) whose patient assistance will be an important part of the performance," Geoffrey said.

There are four main sound elements:

- Plain amplified acoustic flute sound (representing Narcissus);
- Three forms of treated sound representing his reflection:
 - (a) a standard 'delay' where the live flute sound is repeated at a predetermined delayed time interval
 - (b) 'Capture', where a fragment of sound is able to be held until released
 - (c) 'Modulation' - as things come to their tragic conclusion, the flute sound is distorted to represent his descent and death.



Supported by sound technician Ben Carey, flautist Geoffrey Collins takes on *Narcissus*, Thea Musgrave's challenging work for flute and digital delay

Choreographer Sue Healey leapt at the chance to work once more with the Australia Ensemble after the 2013 performance of John Peterson's commissioned work *Double Entendre*.

"Working with live music is a rare treat for most contemporary choreographers now, as budgets don't often stretch that far.

"The relationship between live music and dance has always intrigued me and I have been extremely lucky to work with a diverse range of live music experiences - from orchestras, to jazz and electronic bands, to choirs and new music ensembles and many solo instruments.

"As a performer, the chance to dance with live music is paramount, and is about creating a dialogue that can articulate nuances of communication between the aural and visual.

"It's a delicate partnership that can create real magic for the audience. As a filmmaker, I have control over this as I edit both image and sound, but

the potential for drama in the live experience of music/dance collaboration is something that inspires me as a choreographer.

"For *Narcissus*, I will be choreographing a live solo for Raghav Handa and his filmed image, that will be projected into the auditorium," Sue said.

Greg Keane

Choreographer Sue Healey joins Australia Ensemble flautist Geoffrey Collins for a workshop discussion of preparing Thea Musgrave's *Narcissus* for performance, on Thursday May 21 at 1.10pm in Leighton Hall of the John Niland Scientia Building. Free, all welcome.

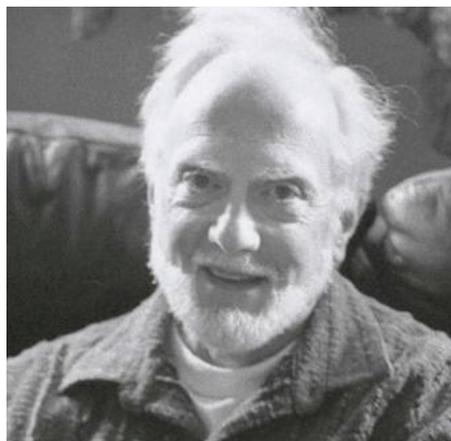
A music no one else can hear

On May 13, composer Nigel Butterley turns 80, a milestone worthy of celebration and considerable reflection about his contribution to music in Australia. By way of celebration, the Australia Ensemble will perform his duo *The wind stirs gently* in the Tuesday lunchtime concert, and his quintet *Spindles of the Stars* in the Saturday subscription concert. To capture an insight into the workings of this distinguished composer, we invited **Chris Williams**, a young composer who has benefitted from having Nigel Butterley as a mentor as he embarked on his own career, to offer his reflections.

Nigel will grin and tell you his problem is a “sublime disregard for the obvious”. His closest friend uses the phrase to describe Nigel’s outlook, and Nigel secretly revels in it. This sublimity brings a refreshing quality and excitement to his music, which always sounds fresh - born anew - with each listening. Sometimes his disregard for the obvious is deliberate but more often, I think, it is a beautiful byproduct of his imagination. Schopenhauer reasoned that “Talent hits a target no one else can hit”, while “Genius hits a target no one else can see.” If this is true, then this is Nigel’s music. He writes a music no one else can hear, and this is his genius.

In his own words: “The mysterious can be much more powerful than the obvious”.

Though I’ve only known Nigel since he was in his early 70s I’ve always been drawn to what I think is an enviable child-like quality in him. He is trusting to a fault. Never naive, but willing to gaze at the world in wonder, and wonder at it. In 1981 - five years before I was born - Richard Coleman tells us that Nigel was “greying, but boyish”. Though a throwaway line about his appearance - he still retains his “boyish” grin and piercing inquisitive eyes - it reflects a deeper,



Composer Nigel Butterley, who celebrates his 80th birthday on May 13

inner quality too. Indeed, with Nigel I often find myself struggling towards something deeper.

Nigel’s gift as a teacher is that he takes his students seriously. He treats them as equals and approaches their music with sincere curiosity, as indeed he approaches all music. Though I never studied formally with Nigel, we would have regular ‘lessons’. They would begin in the afternoon, in the front room. He would have already written notes about my latest piece onto the music or the ubiquitous scraps of paper Nigel has always used to collect his thoughts, and we’d go through these one by one. There were questions as well as suggestions, likes as well as dislikes. During this time Nigel would continue to critically assess, even his own assessments. It was always a humble, honest search for the best musical solution, completely devoid of ego. I’m reminded of George Mackay Brown’s description of the poet, just as easily applied to the composer, as the “interrogator of silence”: always looking for something deeper.

With the formalities out of the way, he might have a book to lend me from the study upstairs, or a new delight in his garden to show me, perhaps stopping between the two to reflect on a new CD in the kitchen. In the evening he would cook a meal, sometimes in tandem with his partner Tom, or else we might be treated to one of Tom’s specialties. After five or six hours the ‘lesson’ might be drawing to a close. In the most profound sense there is no division between composition and life for Nigel. The books, the garden and the meal have as many important things to teach us as the technical discussions. He cares. He cares that things are done well, and it doesn’t



Portrait of Nigel Butterley by Hayley Megan French on the occasion of his 75th birthday

matter if that’s music, literature, gardening or cooking. It doesn’t matter if it’s difficult or if it requires ignoring the obvious solutions. While I learnt a tremendous amount of musical craft from Nigel, the real lesson was about the richness and beauty of being in the world. Though I missed the obvious ‘accidental allusion’ at the time, how apt that Nigel has made his home on ‘Temple’ street.

It’s often said in the musical world that Nigel Butterley’s music deserves more recognition. I’ve recently had cause to look through the historical records, and it’s been said for a long time, even when his music was being played more often. While it’s invariably intended to acknowledge that there aren’t enough performances and recordings of his work (which is true, incidentally), we should also take seriously the implication in reverse. It doesn’t matter how many performances are taking place, his music is always deserving of more recognition. One of Nigel’s heroes, the poet Kathleen Raine, says that “the earth of Heaven is sound”. This is Nigel’s music.

Chris Williams

Raising voices and lifting spirits

If you happen to walk past the Sir John Clancy Auditorium on a Wednesday evening during academic semester, you will not hear the sound of nine hundred students propping up their heads in an effort to remain awake during a lecture on Kierkegaard. Instead you'll be greeted by a wall of sound, literally, as the Collegium Musicum Choir (another of the Music Performance Unit's ensembles) rehearse some of the world's greatest choral music from their tiered risers. This month I spoke with three choristers – UNSW staff member Bill Walker, community member Roswitha Wulff and student Harrison Collins – about their histories with the choir and the impact it has had on their University lives.

The Collegium Musicum was founded in 1975 by Professor Roger Covell and Dr Patricia Brown, and has become part of the very fabric of UNSW. Its choristers are drawn from the student population, the staff population, and from the local community, all of whom come together every Wednesday to enjoy the thrill of musical collaboration and to make new friends in the process.

Bill Walker, Associate Professor of English at UNSW, has been a member of the choir's bass section for nearly six years. "For me there has been an enjoyable social dimension to the whole experience," he says, "just getting to know some fellow choristers and having tea and biscuits and the odd meal with them." Bill is also an avid Handel devotee. "I love the grandeur of the oratorios, like *Israel in Egypt* and *Solomon*. The first session I sang in the choir we performed Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. I found the experience of singing this sublime work in concert so moving that I was literally choked up."

The rigour of the weekly rehearsal process is, in many ways, the most beneficial and enjoyable aspect of singing in a massed choir such as the CMC. Week by week, choristers actively experience the wonders of great choral music as all the parts come together, and when everything finally 'clicks' the feeling is enormously rewarding. "I love the rehearsals," says Bill. "The grinding repetition, the cries of victory, the times when the basses get to sing really loud on their own, the sharpening of flats, the flattening of sharps, the achievement of perfection through bone-crushing discipline!"

In addition to familiar choral repertoire – including Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem* and Orff's *Carmina Burana* – the Collegium Musicum prides itself on being able to present lesser-known works, for the benefit of audience members and choristers alike. Alto Roswitha Wulff, local artist and potter, relishes the opportunity to sing a broad range of music with a vibrant young choir. "I love the current program [sacred music of Schubert, Mozart and Haydn] – it's right up my alley. But I love some of the more unusual selections too, as they're more of a challenge." Roswitha says the choir has helped her become much more confident in her singing. "I love the speed with which everything is learned. And," she says, "I love listening to the talented youngsters!"

Among the ranks of the choir's talented youngsters is physics/music student Harrison Collins, whom keen-eyed AE subscribers will recognise as the Music Performance Unit's resident page-turner. "It keeps you grounded, having something other than class to do on a regular basis, and it allows you to connect with other like-minded singers," Harrison says, singling out Leonard Bernstein's epic *Chichester Psalms* as a highlight of his four years in the choir. "As a music student, the choir is fantastic for your sight-reading and ensemble skills. It's a chance to think about music outside of solo performance."

Three times a year, the choir's hard work comes to fruition in concerts at the Clancy Auditorium, in which choristers perform live with some of Australia's best instrumentalists – including core members of the Australia Ensemble @ UNSW - in the Collegium Musicum Orchestra. For many choristers, their first CMC concert is the first time they have sung in front of an audience. "I find the concert for which we train functions as a great finale to the entire session," enthuses Bill Walker. "Attended by many friends and relatives of the choristers, it is a sweet occasion on which the choir and musicians perform for the university community



Choristers Harrison Collins, Roswitha Wulff and Bill Walker

some beautiful choral works of the great composers. I think of it as a formal, ritualistic, communal act of offering up a beautiful thing to the university community, and I find it very moving to participate in it."

Instilling a passion for choral singing in its members and presenting that music for listeners all over the University to enjoy is what has inspired the Collegium Musicum since its auspicious beginnings. Now under the direction of choral director Sonia Maddock and accompanied for rehearsals by pianist Patrick Keith, the CMC remains a place where not only music students but anyone can gather to indulge in their love for music.

Luke Iredale

The Collegium Musicum Choir and Orchestra will perform Schubert's *Magnificat*, Mozart's *Vesperae solennes de confessore KV339* and Haydn's *Theresa Mass* on Sunday May 31 at 5pm. Australia Ensemble subscribers receive a 15% discount on pre-booked tickets: p. 02 9385 4874, e. cmc@unsw.edu.au