August Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday August 12, 2014
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Marcellino: The Lottery in Babylon
Dvořák: Terzetto in C major
Janáček: Pohádka (Fairy Tale)
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour workshop
Thursday August 14, 2014
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Raffaele Marcellino with Roland Peelman, the Song Company and the Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Marcellino: Suite from Mrs Macquarie’s Cello
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 4, 2014
Saturday August 16, 2014
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Wesley-Smith: db
Janáček: Říkadla
Marcellino: Suite from Mrs Macquarie’s Cello
Dvořák: Piano Quintet Op.81
Guest artists: The Song Company
australia.ensemble@unsw.edu.au

A musical link to the past

The inspiration for a unique work by Raffaele Marcellino arose from the discovery of a cello said to be owned by Elizabeth Macquarie, the wife of Governor Macquarie, now held in the Historic Houses Trust.

The Australia Ensemble’s August Subscription concert features Mrs Macquarie’s Cello, a work written for solo cello and the six singers of The Song Company, who join cellist Julian Smiles as guest artists for this program. The Historic Houses Trust’s description of the cello reads:

‘An important violoncello given to Mrs Macquarie by King George III when she and her husband left to live in Australia.’

Further research has shown that this information is not accurate. In an article in The Australian in 2010, Ian Watchorn emphasises that it was not possible for the cello to have come with the Macquaries on their voyage to Australia, as Governor Macquarie left to take up his position in NSW in 1810, while the inscription inside the instrument reads ‘Thos. Kennedy Maker, London, 1814’.

Despite the uncertainty as to how the Macquaries gained ownership of the instrument, there is evidence in a letter by Mrs Macquarie to Mary Ann Piper dated February 9, 1822 written prior to her returning to Britain, that she did have a cello: “I have to request your and Captain Piper’s acceptance of a violoncello, which I hope will be found to sound well in your house at Point Piper.”

Australian composer Raffaele Marcellino had heard the story of Mrs Macquarie’s cello and saw the instrument with Roland Peelman, Artistic Director of the Song Company, when it was first shown to the public.

Peelman recalls:

I think it was a cellist, a mutual friend of ours who now lives in Denmark (cellist Peter Morrison), who had the idea or who encouraged Raf to write a piece for Mrs Macquarie’s original cello which had been displayed in an exhibition, but as a mere artefact. In the un-restored state it then was, it prompted a response and that set a whole train of actions and thoughts in motion, and different perspectives on this European instrument that somehow had become stranded here in Australia in the early days of the colony.
Marcellino was keen to write for the original instrument though it was not clear at the time whether it was possible for the cello to be played, even after significant restoration. Additionally, the staff at the Historic Houses Trust were not keen at the time to have the instrument handled by others. This did not deter Marcellino from his innovative project.

Marcellino considers Mrs Macquarie’s Cello as a ‘sound design’ or ‘a musical portrait of the Macquaries’. He has worked with Peelman on numerous projects and considers their partnership as a ‘rich collaboration’, and feels that Peelman is sensitive to what he wishes to achieve in his compositions, the ‘dramaturg to his playwright’. Peelman has maintained an active interest in Marcellino’s music over the years and conducted numerous premieres of his works. Although Mrs Macquarie’s Cello was originally conceived as a radio play, Marcellino believes that the work transfers well to the concert stage.

As a radio play, Mrs Macquarie’s Cello is a fascinating piece. In addition to the music performed by voices and cello, actors tell two stories concurrently. One represents the history of the cello as told by the instrument maker, and the other actor places the cello in context with the Macquaries’ life in Sydney and the controversy that surrounded Lachlan Macquarie’s time as Governor. Although considered innovative in his governance of the penal colony, not all of Lachlan Macquarie’s initiatives were popular with the aristocracy, and he was denounced during the Royal Commission of 1819. The play also documents how Elizabeth Macquarie worked hard to clear her husband’s name after his death in 1824, with information sourced from letters, reports and diaries.

Raffaele Marcellino is one of Australia’s celebrated and respected composers who has written numerous works for an eclectic range of instruments and genres. He is no stranger to collaborative projects nor to the work of the Australia Ensemble. Previous Australia Ensemble programs have included the Whitlam Rags, Keating Tangos, and The Art of Perception, commissioned for the Australia Ensemble for a conference on Perception hosted by UNSW. Marcellino’s oeuvre has extended to opera, and The Flight of Les Darcy and Midnite have been premiered at the Ten Days on the Island Festival in Tasmania and the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts respectively. The Flight of Les Darcy inspired a shorter work, Les Darcy Dances, commissioned and performed as part of a set of miniatures for the Australia Ensemble’s 30th anniversary celebration concert in September 2009.

It is wonderful to have such treasures as Raffaele Marcellino, The Song Company and Artistic Director Roland Peelman involved in the August Subscription Concert of the Australia Ensemble, and we look forward to the interaction between these two fine Sydney ensembles.

Child’s Play

One of Josef Lada’s illustrations used to accompany the score of Říkadla

aged 25, totally absorbed by her beautiful eyes and dark complexion. Although the relationship was never fully realised, Kamila was his greatest love, friend and muse. The letters between the two inspired his String Quartet No. 2 ‘Intimate Letters’.

Janáček was close to Kamila’s young sons and played a significant role in their lives. In Říkadla, Janáček reflects the nostalgia of his childhood and describes the work as ‘something for laughter’. The folksongs in Czech, Slovak and Ruthenian are about animals, and the original score was conceived with quirky illustrations by Josef Lada and other artists.
A few thoughts from The Song Company’s Roland Peelman

Welcoming The Song Company for the August subscription concert, I spoke with their Artistic Director Roland Peelman about the future of classical music in Australia and the wonders of a cappella singing. 

**JD:** Your work as Artistic Director of the Song Company has been an inspiration to the betterment of Australian music. What is special and unique about a cappella singing as a genre? 

**R.P.** Ah, now you are getting me started! But I will try and be brief... A cappella singing has a long and fascinating history. The history of western music and our unique development of harmony is totally bound up in the culture of ensemble singing. It is only when the technology of building new instruments became a real business that this form of music making took a backstep. But the essence of ensemble singing, or a cappella singing (without instruments) is a function of our humanity. When we speak or converse we have to wait for one another to finish before we can butt in or respond. But when we sing we can do it all simultaneously: we can inform and inspire each other without having to wait our turn, and what’s more, we can do it with the most beautiful sounds, that were not made in a workshop or factory.

We were born with it!

**JD:** You have made a significant contribution to Australian culture. With the changing times do you think there is a future for Australian ‘art music’ composition and classical music in general?

**R.P.** We hear quite a bit about the decline in ‘classical music’ business and some very gloomy reports from US in particular about orchestras in trouble and opera companies shutting down. In Europe, many organisations have also felt the pinch. Holland went through some ‘rationalisation’ process over the last six or so years, and in Italy financial upheavals have affected some of the bigger festivals and organisations. But in the scheme of things, these ‘market adjustments’ and changes can also have positive results. Australia has escaped most of the trouble that US and Europe went through, but we have a remarkable habit here of talking ourselves into a state of panic when there is a ripple on Wall Street or a hiccup in London. In that sense too, I believe Australian ‘art music’ is doing pretty well. The scene is diverse and vigorous from the more conservative end of town to the more adventurous avant garde scene. What is interesting is that both ends of the spectrum are internationally well-connected. Both Brett Dean and someone like Anthony Pateras straddle the European and Australian music world.

In terms of the ‘classical scene’, what we are witnessing is a re-definition of what that actually means; and I believe that, with the emergence of a very large new middle class in Asia with Western middle-class aspirations, the classical music scene will actually grow again in real terms, but in the process it will inevitably change. How much that will affect Australia will depend on our own geo-political alliances. But there is no doubt that the change is already happening. Some will bemoan it and see it as the beginning of the end, and some will grab the new opportunities created.

An Australian Pioneer

This month, the Australia Ensemble also performs the music of Australian composer, Martin Wesley-Smith, an adventurous and eclectic composer known for exploring both the acoustic and electronic music sound worlds. His 1991 work *db* for flute/alto flute, clarinet, piano and cello was dedicated to Don Banks, one of Australia’s most important and innovative composers from the mid-twentieth century, considered by Wesley-Smith as both a ‘colleague and personal friend’. Wesley-Smith is considered to be the pioneer of audio visual composition in Australia and has long been a keen and regular collaborator with the Australia Ensemble.

In addition, Martin Wesley Smith’s satirical choral work *Who Killed Cock Robin?* will be performed in the Burgundian Consort’s September 24 recital, conducted by our own Sonia Maddock. To answer the question posed in the title, the composer explores many possibilities: *Is it the sparrow with his bow and arrow or did Cock Robin die of pesticides instead?* All will be revealed in September!
Subscriber, philanthropist, and true friend of the arts

The Australia Ensemble has been fortunate to have had several works commissioned by subscribers over recent years, each leaving a great legacy to Australian chamber music. One such supporter is Sean Buck, who has subscribed to the series with his partner for ten years. Sean has a genuine appreciation for the work of the Ensemble and its music, and endeavours to provide opportunities for composers and artists through commissioning new works.

In 2012, the Australia Ensemble premiered Maria Grenfell’s *Ten Suns Ablaze*, commissioned by Sean Buck in celebration of his 50th anniversary of moving to Australia. Sean was kind enough to answer a few questions on his love for music and his role in contributing to maintaining a culture of Australian music.

**J.D:** Why do you enjoy going to the performances given by the Australia Ensemble?

**S.B:** What I really enjoy about the Australia Ensemble annual subscription concerts is that each concert is both entertaining and interesting, and the repertoire the Australia Ensemble brings to the concert platform is well constructed. To hear live music-making by a group of musicians of the calibre of the members of the Australia Ensemble is a rare treat and, most importantly, a concert is a wonderful expression of how humanity can work together and appreciate the results of this collaboration.

**J.D:** What do you love about music as an art form?

**S.B:** I have a great capacity to listen to music for hours on end. I love music because it can make me feel a wide array of emotions. I don’t have an analytical ear nor the training to discern the structural elements and I rely on program notes to alert me to these. At primary teachers’ college, I elected to study music for two years. However, my studies were not so much geared to music practice but an introduction of music theory, music forms and the appreciation of music. As an adult, I have been fortunate to have attended a range of musical performances. I enjoy the variety, and to observe how the different groups approach and interpret a work.

**J.D:** Australia needs more philanthropists like yourself. What are your views on arts funding?

**S.B:** In Australia, private sponsorship of arts organisations has not been a major contribution to the funding of these bodies. Government grants and ticket sales have been the primary sources of funding with tickets sales contributing a very small percentage. Over the last thirty years we have seen governments successively cut back on funding so that while the total funding pie may have increased, the slices awarded to the major institutions has diminished. There are also more groups and individuals seeking funding and the governments contributions are now spread ever thinner. Twelve months ago I was in the United States of America and I became very conscious of the great numbers of individuals who contribute to the funding of their arts institutions. I think in Australia we need to follow the American lead in taking up philanthropy and contributing to our cultural life in a very positive and supportive way.

We have in the past developed some very fine world-class musicians and they have thrived because we have had the institutions to support them and enabled them to grow and develop to a standard competitive in the international market place. If we allow our institutions to wither because of lack of funds, future generations of Australians who wish to pursue music as a career will no longer get the support they need and we will lose our place in the musical world.

While we may hope that the super rich will fill the void we should not sit on their laurels but should also contribute as best we can. What amazed me was how little was required to commission a ten minute piece of music for the Australia Ensemble. In my case I wanted something concrete as a celebration of fifty years of life in Australia. The Australian community has given me a very good life and I wanted to acknowledge that in some significant way. We all have significant celebrations and very often we do not need another object in our lives. Commissioning an art work can be a wonderful gift for a loved one. Commissioning music seems to me great value for money. It gives employment to the composer and the performing musicians and from my experience it is a real thrill to be a part of the exercise. I was excited about it for over a year and really thrilled with the finished product and the wonderful way the Australia Ensemble performed the work.

*To explore commissioning opportunities, please contact the Australia Ensemble @UNSW on (02) 9385 4872 during business hours.*

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