

August Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday August 11, 2015
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Smetana: *Z Domoviny*
Poulenc: Sonata for clarinet & bassoon
Beach: Flute Quintet

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour workshop
Thursday August 13, 2015
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Natalie Shea talks about Czech music as an introduction to '*Bohemian Dreams*'
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 4, 2015
Saturday August 15, 2015
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Mozart: *Flute quartet K298*
Pudlak: *Sextet*
Janacek: *Concertino*
Dvorak: *Piano Quartet Op.87*

Czech coloured dreams

The August program **Bohemian Dreams** brings centuries of Czech traditions to the Australia Ensemble audience, as musicologist **Robert Forgács** explores.



The repertoire in *Bohemian Dreams* spans a period of over 200 years and bears eloquent testimony to the richness and sophistication of the Czech musical tradition. Dance, song, language and the beauty of the natural environment were the continual sources of inspiration for the composers in this program, each responding to these colourful stimuli in varied but related ways.

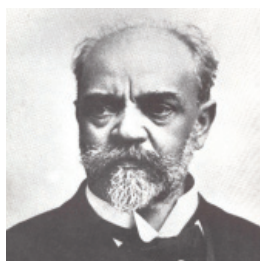
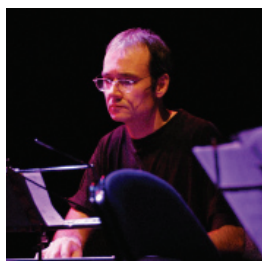
The earliest work chronologically and the only piece to be by a non-Czech composer is **Mozart's Flute Quartet in A major, K.298**. Mozart, although Austrian by birth, was nowhere more appreciated than in Prague. This Flute Quartet was composed around the time of his first visit to the city, where he arrived on January 11, 1787, to conduct a performance of his outstandingly successful opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Three days before this performance on January 22, Mozart had played the pianoforte at a concert at the Nostitz Theatre (where *Figaro* also was staged), improvising on the celebrated aria from the opera's First Act, *Non più andrai*. A similar comic-opera character pervades this Quartet: it is light-hearted with each movement being based on a popular melody: in the first movement it is the song *An die Natur* (To Nature) by the Viennese composer Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812), in the second it is an old French Rondeau *Il a des bottes, des bottes, Bastien* (He has boots, boots has Bastien), while the finale's principal melody is from the opera by Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816) *Le gare generose* (The Generous Rivals), which had premiered in Vienna on September 1, 1786.

For a composer now regarded as one of the great figures of early twentieth-century music, Janáček's career was most unusual. It was spent in relative obscurity in the provincial city of Brno until the sensational premiere of his opera *Jenufa* in Prague in 1916 launched him onto the international scene. Among Janáček's subsequent series of operatic masterpieces was *The Cunning Little Vixen* (1922-1923), which is closely related to his **Concertino for piano, two violins, viola, clarinet, horn and bassoon** of 1925. Janáček was inspired

to write this piece after hearing the virtuoso pianist Jan Herman, to whom he dedicated it, originally intending it to be a piano concerto but then preferring the chamber music medium. When it was premiered in Prague in 1926 the critic Jaroslav Vogel commented: "The eternally young old man from Brno surprised us...with a work, which, again, was a revelation...Not a Symphony with piano, but a suite, which could bear the title Nature. It is clear that the *Concertino* belongs to the world of *The Cunning Little Vixen*..." The following year, in an article in the journal *Pult und Taktstock*, Janáček explained that the piece was inspired by childhood thoughts and experiences. The first movement arose from his memory of a Spring day when he prevented a very determined and disturbed hedgehog from reaching its food store in an old linden tree. The second movement depicts the agitated screeching and dance-like revolving of a squirrel, locked by children in a cage. In the third movement Janáček was thinking of the staring eyes of an owl and other "critical night birds", while the mood of the finale he summed up in the words: "everything seems to quarrel over a small coin, as in a Fairy Tale".

Miroslav Pudlák, the contemporary composer in the program, studied composition and musicology at the Conservatory and at the Charles University in Prague, followed by studies at Paris Sorbonne VIII, and at Darmstadt, Kazimierz and Amsterdam. Since 1996 he has been director of the Czech Music

Information Centre, and teaches at the tertiary level in Prague. His *Sextet* of 1996 bears the subtitle 'On-da-tre' which, according to the composer: "resembles the plural of the word ondata (as in Italian or the Haná dialect); however, it also sounds like counting from one to three in some unknown Romance (or Romany?) dialect - on, dah, tree...The music was written as the grammar of an



Four composers offer their own version of a Bohemian aesthetic: (clockwise from top left) Miroslav Pudlák, Antonín Dvořák, Wolfgang Mozart, Leos Janáček

unknown but familiar language...The words of this language only find their meanings in chance associations." Clearly, Pudlák is interested in a certain esotericism, but this appealing *Sextet* can be viewed more straightforwardly from a purely musical point of view as exploiting the rich colours of the instrumental ensemble, with the use of such varied techniques as tonal clusters, dance-like minimalist

rhythms, pseudo-string techniques on the wind instruments, and elaborate trills and other decorations.

Antonín Dvořák was one of the greatest and most prolific chamber-music composers of the nineteenth century. He wrote his *Piano Quartet in E flat, op.87* during the same period as his Eighth Symphony, a period classed as representing the apex of his melodic individuality. The

work was completed in August 1889, and premiered in Prague in November 1890. The great popularity of the work is easy to understand: it encompasses a wide range of carefully balanced moods and emotions, and is marked by broad lyrical melodic content, great harmonic beauty, fine craftsmanship and a strong sense of drama. The slow movement has been described as "among the loveliest in thought-content and the most deeply moving in mood which Dvořák created." The scherzo pays homage to the Viennese waltz, juxtaposing this very cleverly with a certain Bohemian rusticity, while the exuberant finale, with its irresistible dance rhythms and folk-inspired melodies, shows why Dvořák came to epitomise the Czech school of composers. A particular highlight of this movement is the prominence of the viola part, Dvořák's own instrument.

Bohemian Dreams
Saturday August 15 at 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW

An American prodigy

Australia Ensemble pianist **Ian Munro** has long had an interest in the music of American composer Amy Beach, whose work is little known in Australia. The Australia Ensemble's upcoming lunchtime concert performance of her quintet for flute and strings has provided an opportunity for Ian to introduce our readers to the story behind this remarkable woman.

In 1915, Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, wrote: "It seems impossible for woman to create a beauty that must come from the soul and encompass a comprehension of the supernatural beauty that is given to us through the master artist. True, America has Mrs Beach and France Cécile Chaminade... But we have not opera, concerto, symphony, oratorio, or string quartet from womankind. Their work is light and frothy... they have not produced anything that could even be called near great." Damrosch was, despite the outburst,

actually a prominent contemporary interpreter of Mrs H. A. Beach's music, and we may at least appreciate the candour with which he recorded a sentiment that tacitly persists in some quarters to this day, and for sparking a debate at the time that ignited a wider interest in art by women.

Amy Marcy Cheney was, by all accounts, a precocious child. Able to sing forty songs by her first birthday, she was composing waltzes by the age of four and made her first concert appearance at seven, upon which she was

immediately approached by managers and agents offering representation to an American prodigy. Once she had relocated with her parents from rural New Hampshire to Boston, her entrée into the wider world of America's second capital of culture was made smoother, so that by the time of her official debut at sixteen she had already attracted a group of influential admirers (such as the poets Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes) who followed and supported the growth of her talent. Her gifts were such that, had she been a boy, she would certainly have travelled to Europe for further studies in piano and composition, but this was not condoned by her father, with the result that she was partly self-taught in the former and almost entirely in the latter.

At eighteen, she married the illustrious surgeon Henry Beach, a widower 24 years her senior, who required of his young wife that she must not pursue a professional career, and that her appearances would be limited to one or two benefit concerts per year, with the proceeds donated to charity, thereby preserving the decorum Henry wished to maintain. The marriage seemed to have been happy, nevertheless, the couple living luxuriously in Henry's mansion on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. A year after becoming widowed, however, she sailed for Europe on her forty-fourth birthday and embarked on a three-year international tour that quickly established her as one of the leading American musicians of the day. Ironically, she was thus earning the money she discovered she needed to pay off the substantial debts accrued by Henry without her knowledge.

Returning to Boston in 1913, she became involved with the MacDowell Colony, a venture devoted to supporting the development of fellow American artists established by the most famous local composer of the time, Edward MacDowell (1860—1908). It had been his 'Indian' Suite op.48 for orchestra (1892), which Amy admired, which seems to have sparked her interest in adapting native American musical materials in her works twenty years earlier, at a time when nationalist movements in music were prompting exploration and preservation of folk songs and folklore. Following her visit to the World Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, her attentions began to turn to questions of musical provenance, and she began expressing, in her writings as well as her music, concern for answers to the question: what is American music?

It was also in 1893 that Dvorak, then living in the United States, premiered his ninth symphony 'From the New World', publicly declaring that the future of American music lay in its folk heritage. Beach responded with the first of her 'Indianist' works, 'An Indian Lullaby', a four-part song for women's chorus, written in 1895. The anonymous author of the text

*Sleep in thy forest bed
Where silent falls the tread
On the needles soft and deep
Of the pine*

may well have been Amy herself. Although there are no folk or indigenous melodies included in the song, the intention to evoke an impression of native life is beautifully rendered in a gently wistful, romanticised way. Soon, she was acquiring a knowledge of authentic native musics and incorporating themes and stylistic traits in her own



works. Probably the best known of these remains her suite *Eskimos* op.64, which borrows indigenous tunes collected in Labrador.

So it was that, when she received a commission from the San Francisco Quintet Club in 1915, she turned to 'An Indian Lullaby' for a theme.

Following on from her most famous work, the impressively sumptuous piano quintet of 1907, she employed skills honed in her grand piano concerto (1899) and 'Gaelic' Symphony (1894) in gracefully idiomatic string writing, that at once effectively provides an evocative setting for the solo flute and richly expands and decorates the original song.

In a series of seven variations, she gifted the original interpreter, flautist Elias Hecht, with an elegantly virtuosic vehicle laden with brilliant passage work and fine cantilena melodies, with plenty of characteristic late nineteenth century vignettes, so favoured in the salons of Europe.

From the elegiac opening address by the strings to the haunting coda, a panorama of descriptive character sketches leads us from quicksilver Mendelssohnian scherzi to a heartfelt Wagnerian largo, with a languorous *fin de siècle* waltz and an intriguing, nostalgic glance backwards by way of recapitulation. "The theme, haunting and beautiful, had seven variations, each one exquisite in form. Technically, they were worthy of the mettle of these star men," wrote the Musical Leader after the premiere, and the piece has remained a favourite with American flute players ever since. Nevertheless, it took until 1942 for it to receive its East Coast premiere, during celebrations for her 75th birthday in Washington DC.

For the rest of her life, Mrs H. H. A. Beach, as she continued to be known professionally, became a fixture of the Boston and New York musical scenes, widely respected as a pianist and always popular as a composer, surviving the gentle and gradual eclipse of all artists born of her era, as the ructions and modernities of the post World War I period proceeded apace. Unlike Mr Damrosch, however, her music has never left the American canon, and only gains greater international recognition as the years have passed since her death in 1944. The *Theme and Variations* for flute and string quartet is one of her finest chamber works, rarely heard in Australia, and will be given its first performance in the Australia Ensemble lunchtime series on Tuesday 11 August.

Making a small screen debut

The music industry has seen growth in popularity of the use of 'tablet' computer screens to read scores, and April saw their first use in an Australia Ensemble @UNSW concert for the performance of Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello. Following interest voiced by some in our audience, cellist Julian Smiles offers his thoughts on the ins-and-outs of tablets in the concert hall.

To begin the process, the Ravel music was digitally scanned from our original 'hard copies' as PDFs (portable document files). Although music is becoming increasingly available to purchase or download as PDFs, in this instance we felt it was best to have our version of the music with its many years of markings.

The music was then transferred to the tablets - in our case, Apple iPads. There are many ways of doing this. We have chosen to upload our scores to the 'cloud' so that we can have access to it anywhere we can access a Wi-Fi network, covering potential loss or failure of equipment. Obviously we hope this never happens, but when you don't carry an umbrella...

Once on the iPad, the music is viewed and manipulated using an appropriate 'app'. We use the software ForScore which allows us to choose many ways of viewing the music, and, most importantly, make notations. This is where this new system really comes into its own, as you can make notations (with your finger or a stylus) in any colour or size, or in type-set print, and you can white things out completely.

The screen of the iPad is 10 inches measured on the diagonal, slightly more than half the size of our regular

music. Although the music score is small on-screen, the backlit display makes it easy to read, and any issues of stage lighting for the music become irrelevant. If one finds the music too small one can tip the iPad on its side and view the music 'landscape', which presents it at approximately the same size as the original, viewing half a page at a time.



Regarding page turns: obviously with the original scores one only has to turn once every second page, as with a book. When viewing music on the iPad in portrait mode one has the option of a 'split-screen' page turn where the top section of the page only turns first. The advantage of this is that you can always see what's coming and you have a great deal of freedom with where you turn. In landscape mode the split-screen turn

is not an option and the turns have to be made exactly at the end of the page.

Either way we are turning up to four times for every single turn we used to make. This one disadvantage is balanced by the fact that we make these turns while we play using foot pedals which are wirelessly connected to the iPads. This took a bit of getting used to - early rehearsals looked like a cockroach was on the loose, with aimless and frenetic stomping - but with familiarity it became second nature. There are many cases with printed sheet music where the page turn is literally impossible - this can now be looked back on as a '20th century problem'.

There are many other advantages to the new system, not least of which is that one can have an entire library of music accessible from a single relatively small electronic device, rather than carrying around kilograms of sheet music. As a teacher I'm particularly excited by the notion that I will no longer have to rifle through a filing cabinet when a student turns up to work on a particular piece.

I'm sure you will see this technology used more frequently on concert platforms in the future. You certainly will in our case.



Music in the Hunter: 25th Anniversary Year
Australia's most intimate chamber music festival.

18-20 September 2015, Mercure Resort Hunter Valley Gardens, Pokolbin. The festival showcases some of Australia's greatest artists - this year the Goldner String Quartet are joined by renowned mezzo-soprano Fiona Campbell and acclaimed pianist and Australia Ensemble colleague Ian Munro. With four concerts during the weekend and the Hunter Valley's finest food and wine on offer, it is one of Australia's finest and most intimate chamber music events.

To register: constablevineyards.com.au/events or phone Philippa Horn on 0411 606 077.