September Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
**Tuesday September 16, 2014**
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Benjamin: *Pastoral Fantasy*
Stanford: *Three intermezzi*
Berkeley: *Sonatina Op.13*
Schumann: *Märchenerzählungen Op.132*
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour workshop
**Thursday September 18, 2014**
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Ian Munro and the Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Benjamin: *Clarinet Quintet*
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 5, 2014
**Saturday September 20, 2014**
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Bach: *Flute Sonata BWV1032*
Benjamin: *Clarinet Quintet*
Smalley: *Clarinet Trio*
Mendelssohn: *Symphony no.1 for violin, cello and piano duo*

Publications Specialist:
Dr Joanna Drimatis

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**The Performance Instinct**

For pianist David Fung, music is an art form full of potential beyond the concert hall. It is this level of dedication to performance that has so far characterised the career of this fine young musician and in-demand artistic director, who recently took the time to discuss his musical background and current projects.

David Fung was ‘completely floored’ by Ian Munro’s performance of Debussy’s *Images Book 2* and *Clair de lune* in an Australia Ensemble concert in 2013, and feels privileged to be working with Munro and his Australia Ensemble colleagues in the transcribed version of Mendelssohn’s Symphony no.1 in the forthcoming performance.

Fung came from a home that was full of music. His parents loved the arts and he and his brother were encouraged to play musical instruments, starting on violin at age 6 and commencing piano lessons a few years later. He calls himself a ‘late’ starter on the piano as he commenced lessons aged 8, and furthered his studies with Gabriella Pusner, who took him through to AMEB Diploma exams. Fung was keen to relay that music was always ‘fun’ to play at home and he loved to play violin duets with his brother.

After attending James Ruse Technical High School, Fung was awarded a scholarship to study both Music and Medicine at UNSW. He recalls his time at UNSW as being particularly special, and fondly remembers playing principal second violin in the UNSW Orchestra, before the next few years brought ‘a strange turn of events’. In the first year of his medical degree, he won the ABC’s Australian Young Performer’s Award which was the kick start that convinced him to pursue music as a profession. This competition, coupled with his attendance at the Aspen Music Festival with Leon Fleischer as mentor, gave him the confidence to accept a fully endowed place at the the Colburn Music School in California, now one of America’s leading music schools. With the full
support of UNSW faculty, Fung was granted leave from his medical degree to pursue music. After graduating from Colburn, Fung has continued his studies and he is now in the final stages of completing his doctoral degree at Yale University.

These days, Fung regularly performs in the USA, Germany and Belgium as a concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. However, he believes it is his role as Artistic Director of the Bari International Music Festival that provides him with the opportunity to truly make a difference in the musical community. Since his appointment, Fung has initiated a more professional structure to the organisation and curated five years of innovative programs. These initiatives have included a current website, an emerging artist program, and a list of international performing artists which has enhanced the global profile of the festival. David enjoys the challenge of creating programs for the festival, and is attracted to literary themes and finding musical connections between composers. His intent is to ‘open peoples’ minds about how they perceive and contextualise the music.’

Fung strives to be the best musician that he can be, and is constantly fascinated with ‘what brings that performance instinct out and how one brings that instinct out to the public in performance.’ Throughout his career, Fung has enjoyed the support of renowned pianist and conductor Jeffrey Kahane, working together on several projects with Kahane’s ensemble, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. When Fung asked Kahane for career advice, the conductor responded with a statement that continues to resonate with him: ‘Every success comes from something great’.

One of Fung’s more recent endeavours is called Music Heals Us, a concert series taking music to people in the Connecticut community who have limited access to fine classical music performances. The Advisory Committee for the concert series is led by celebrated violinist Itzhak Perlman and his wife Toby. The project involves five Saturday night performances in beautiful old churches in Connecticut, using alumni performers from prestigious east coast music schools and festivals such as the Julliard School, Curtis Institute and the Marlboro Festival. The following day, there are performances in hospitals and rehabilitation centres, stemming from the philosophy behind the concert series that ‘music unlocks parts of the brain that cannot be readily accessed’, citing Oliver Sacks as a supporter of this theory.

In terms of the relevance and survival of classical music in a contemporary environment, Fung believes “Music is the basis for everything and that it is an integral part of society.” He feels that restricting classical music performance to the concert hall is not what many composers originally intended. Fung would like to see classical music performed in more intimate and casual settings such as bars and restaurants, where audiences would be closer to the action and may be more inclined to interact with the musicians after the performance. He believes that “good musicians know no boundaries, and that it is a musician’s job to provide a ‘service’ to the community in as many ways as is possible.”

David Fung: http://www.davidfung.com/
Bari International Chamber Music Festival: http://www.bimf.it/
Beyond the Jamaican Rumba

A conversation between Ian Munro, Australia Ensemble pianist, and Joanna Drimatis, Publications Specialist.

A century after it was written, the Australia Ensemble will give what is believed to be the world premiere performance of Arthur Benjamin’s Clarinet Quintet, sourced from the archives of the British Library and typeset for performance by Ian Munro. The name Arthur Benjamin often evokes recollection of his popular piece, the Jamaican Rumba. But Benjamin was more than a one-work composer, and in conversation with Ian Munro the extent of his depth and brilliance as a composer and pianist emerged.

**JD:** Why Arthur Benjamin?

**IM:** I have a passion for the music of neglected composers. Composers such as Rachmaninov and Benjamin are often characterised by one particular piece, and for Benjamin it was the *Jamaican Rumba*. The *Jamaican Rumba* now exists in several different versions but the original was for two pianos. Given the popular nature of this work, Benjamin has been characterised as being in the ‘light music’ mould.

I can’t say I had given him (Benjamin) much thought until I went on a tour to Northern Ireland in the late 1980s and visited Enniskillen, which is a town that has a rather troubled history. During my visit, the Arts Council guide said: ‘you really must meet Joan Trimble; she is a great local musical character, and she studied with Arthur Benjamin - and you should be interested in that because you’re Australian’.

I met with Joan and she told me all about this wonderful man. I said that I would look into his music and the instant I returned to London, I asked my friends at Boosey and Hawkes what there was available. I discovered that Benjamin had written a wide range of music. I had a look at the viola concerto, all the chamber music, the two piano concertos, the symphony, the violin concerto (which is still very seldom heard) and the list of film scores.

It was obvious at this point that Benjamin was a major figure. It appeared that he was one of a very small number of successful professional Australian composers in the first half of the century, and I thought it was astonishing that there was very little research or any work done or information available on Benjamin, especially as many of his works had been published and recorded.

Arthur Benjamin

I went again to visit Joan in the mid-1990s just before she died. I was recording many of Benjamin’s piano pieces and wanted to hear the whole story. I took along a tape recorder and spent two days with her and we just chatted. From this conversation I made a recording of Joan playing the *Minuet* from Benjamin’s film score for *Return of the Pimpernel*. I was impressed with Joan’s genuine admiration for Benjamin. She was a marvellous woman and a very fine pianist, and very anxious for people to know how great Benjamin was. Joan felt that the story of the *Jamaican Rumba* was indicative of the person that Benjamin was. He used to examine for the Associated Board in the West Indies and returned home with a heap of Jamaican tunes. One of these was the *Mango Walk*, which is the basis of *Jamaican Rumba*. He must have had a mischievous sense of humour and loved the fact that there were some cheeky lyrics in the song. He encouraged Joan and her sister Valerie, while still in their teens, to perform and record a piano duo version of the work which he wrote for them.

**JD:** What is it that intrigues you about the music of Arthur Benjamin?

**IM:** Benjamin was on a life long journey: I have felt an affinity with him, in that we both went to college and studied both piano and composition.
Benjamin was a very knowledgeable composer with a fine technique. It is interesting how he matured after the war – obviously being in the gunners’ turret and being interned strengthened his resolve to pick up his pen and continue to compose with a renewed focus and energy.

Ravel was a definite influence and this can be seen in his work Le Tombeau de Ravel as well as in his general approach to harmony especially in early works such as the Piano Suite. In that piece he doesn’t mention anything about Ravel but it is quite overtly a homage to Ravel’s homage to Couperin. There are also the layers of triadic harmony and the influences of Debussy.

**JD: How did you discover the Clarinet Quintet?**

**IM:** It took a while for the British Library to catalogue all of Benjamin’s materials after his adopted son died. There were about twelve boxes and it was a bit of mess as some pieces were missing.

Amongst these boxes were the Clarinet Quintet and Violin Sonata. I pair the two works because the clarinet quintet was the last work Benjamin wrote as a student before he went to war in 1914, and the violin sonata was the first work he wrote in 1918 after his plane had been shot down and he had been interned.

There are corrective marks on the quintet score that appear to be the markings of Charles Villiers Stanford - the markings are quite bold - and I would like to think it was a pencil owned by ‘Sir Charles’, Benjamin’s teacher at the time. Although Benjamin was a pretty punctilious character I did notice that there were some definite mistakes. Some of the harmony was obviously questioned by Stanford.

It was a student work, which is probably the reason why he didn’t publish it. The work is very Brahmsian, and very Stanfordian (as Stanford was quite Brahmsian). The clarinet quintet was possibly played through at the college in a class which had included the likes of Herbert Howells, the Goossens, René Caprara the clarinettist (whom Benjamin most likely wrote the quintet for). But the question for me is why he didn’t publish the violin sonata as it is a far more mature work.

Hear more on Benjamin’s Clarinet Quintet from Ian Munro on Thursday September 18 at 1.10pm in Leighton Hall, John Niland Scientia Building. Free, all welcome.

For further insight:
http://www.musicweb-international.com/Stoker/benjamin.htm

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**Voice of the people**

At the August concert of the Australia Ensemble @ UNSW, a large number of patrons were surveyed regarding the starting time of the Saturday evening subscription concerts. When offered the choice between 7.30pm and 8pm as the starting time, over 71% of respondents preferred concerts to continue to commence at 8pm. As a consequence, in the 2015 season of the Australia Ensemble @ UNSW, concerts will commence at 8pm, with a promise to our audience to review this preference again in the future.

**Of the earth**

This September, join UNSW’s acclaimed Burgundian Consort as they present Della terra, an engrossing concert program exploring the beauty, fragility and whimsy of the earth. Program highlights include Debussy’s velvety Trois chansons d’Orleans and the vivid word-painting of Paul Hindemith’s Six Chansons after poems by Maria Rilke. A selection of Monteverdi’s best-known madrigals – songs of love, springtime and the ocean breeze – are sure to delight, while Martin Wesley-Smith’s wickedly humorous Who Killed Cock Robin? is a musical melting-pot of barbershop, doo-wop and show tunes quite unlike anything you’ve ever heard.

Guest artist: Australia Ensemble @UNSW pianist Ian Munro

Wednesday, September 24 at 7.30pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium.
Adult $12, concession $6.
Farewell to a musical pioneer

Peter Sculthorpe was a true pioneer of contemporary Australian composition, with an extensive catalogue of works in a career of more than sixty years, and a strong sense of place with many works relating to Australia and its Pacific neighbours. He challenged audiences and performers in his early years, not always with a positive reaction, but became something of a figurehead for composition in Australia and very much celebrated by local audiences. His many years involved with the University of Sydney and international universities resulted in considerable influence on subsequent generations of composers and performers. A lifetime of working with performers across the country has forged many strong bonds, and the musicians of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW have taken this opportunity to offer some of their memories of the life of this great composer who has had immeasurable impact on the Australian musical community.

I first met Peter in 1983 when I travelled to Sydney with the Canberra Youth Orchestra to perform in that orchestra for his piano concerto. I was struck immediately by his friendliness and complete lack of airs. To be conversed with on the level by a national icon when one is in one’s mid teens leaves a lasting impression. Performing his music overseas has always made me homesick, and playing his music on the steps of the opera house with the Australian Youth Orchestra for the bicentennial celebrations was a very powerful experience. To have performed and recorded his string quartets in Australia and overseas, many times with him in attendance, has been a very important part of my musical life. I have always been impressed by the close personal connections he formed with very important members of the wider arts community as well as other VIPs. Again this heightens the sense of honour that I felt in our friendship over many years. I will remember him above all for his gentleness, quiet humour and integrity.

Julian Smiles

[photo: Bridget Elliot]
I was thirteen years old when I first heard the name Peter Sculthorpe. The school orchestra was introduced to his Sun Music II, still one of Peter’s most modern-sounding works and an almost incomprehensible aural and technical challenge for us, and for me as a beginner cellist. It already struck me at the time as inhabiting the same territory as the sere and eerie reddish brown outback scenes of Russell Drysdale, rather than the more hedonistic Streetons and Conders I was infatuated with then, and it had a haunting aura that has stayed with me ever since.

Coming to love his music was gradual. In 1981 I was selected to premiere his Nocturnal, an austere and enigmatic piece (which Peter soon withdrew) that revealed its secrets only when it was recast as the beautiful piano concerto the following year. Always the same gentle, generous man with a wicked sense of humour.

With the Australia Ensemble, Peter reworked pieces for our forces, including two versions of Irkanda IV. I wish I had known him better. Over the years, we met at festivals, concerts, recording sessions, parties, exhibitions, film screenings. My favourite times, though, were just going to Woollahra for lunch and a play of the piano, especially when we looked at the folders of juvenilia which Peter had kept unpublished but which held tender and affectionate memories for him. The other times I would say I treasure are the idyllic yet strenuous days and nights at Dartington Hall in Devon, where Peter was a guest composer, valued both for his music and for his great entertainment value, particularly after midnight, when charades might or might not have taken some very imaginative turns.

I’m still getting my head around what it means that he is gone, but am very proud to have known him a little, and very happy to have discovered his music so early and to have had it in my life and fingers. It’s a unique and magical body of work and Peter was an extraordinary artist of genius to have given it to us.

Ian Munro
The Australia Ensemble and its individual members have all had strong relationships with Peter Sculthorpe and particular pieces of music he wrote throughout his career. As the Goldner String Quartet, the four string players of the Australia Ensemble have performed and subsequently recorded all of Sculthorpe's String Quartets, with a final disc to be soon released. Sculthorpe arranged his Irkanda IV specially for the Australia Ensemble for flute and string trio, and later for flute and string quartet, and works such as Songs of Sea and Sky and Small Town would be familiar to Australia Ensemble audiences. Pianist Ian Munro has played many of Sculthorpe’s solo piano works, and toured his Piano Concerto. As performed at the August concert of the Australia Ensemble, Sculthorpe offered A Little Song of Love for clarinet quintet as part of the Australia Ensemble’s 30th season celebrations, and rescored his own song from earlier in his career for Geoffrey Collins, in the short flute and piano work Parting. It is a body of work the Australia Ensemble will continue to cherish, and audiences will recognise as being a vital part of chamber music in Australia.

I feel privileged to say that Peter Sculthorpe and his music has been a part of my musical life for as long as I can remember; from the junior ensembles and chamber orchestras of the Sydney Youth Orchestra, through student days at the Conservatorium and on throughout my professional life, his music and persona has been a constant. His Lament for strings and Port Essington featured heavily in my student and early professional years and of course all his string quartets and works for mixed ensembles have been our constant companions and works which we regularly and proudly perform internationally. To me, his music has a fundamental connection to people which transcends boundaries, and is often enjoyed by audiences new to Classical chamber music. It paints a vivid picture of a landscape which is unmistakably Australian; he was a pioneer in developing a truly Australian musical language and soundscape. He loss is keenly felt.

Dimity Hall

Peter was a very influential figure in my life: in fact he got me into this whole composing business in the first place. He heard a fledgling piano piece of mine and made a point of seeking me out and telling me he liked it. That the great Peter Sculthorpe said this to me was enough for me to start taking the idea of pursuing composition a bit more seriously and later, as a postgrad student, he became my teacher and mentor.

As a teacher he was encouraging and discussions often ranged across ‘big picture’ ideas in aesthetics and philosophy. He had a great ear and eye for identifying problems in a composition, but ultimately left it up to me to solve. I would ask him “what do you recommend here?” and in that booming, smoker’s baritone he would reply “well – what do you think?”. He prompted you to enquire within yourself and come up with solutions. Being Peter’s student also meant you were brought into his creative fold, and there was much to learn from a working composer in worldwide demand. His work ethic was enormous – there was much for a student to learn from this – and his hospitality also tremendous.

When pieces were complete, the doors were flung open and the celebrating began. Champagne flowed at Peter’s parties where fascinating people from all parts of life were invited. Being a part of Peter’s world was a great privilege. He was insightful, gracious, mischievous and he loved a good bit of gossip. But above all, he was a serious composer whose contribution to Australian cultural life is truly towering, dwarfing that of Percy Grainger. He defined the sound of a whole nation and influenced generations of students such as myself. It’s hard to believe that there can be music in Australia without Peter. Our memories of him live on, but, more profoundly, so does his music.

Paul Stanhope

UNSW Senior Lecturer in Music Composition, Dr John Peterson, is well-known to Australia Ensemble audiences for several recent commissions including his work for piano quintet and dancers, Double Entendre performed in 2013. John studied composition with Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney, and recently completed a book entitled The Music of Peter Sculthorpe, an analytical update on the music composed throughout Sculthorpe’s career, published by Wildbird Music. Fortunately, John did have opportunity to visit Peter Sculthorpe and present him with a published copy of the book, fresh off the press.

The influence of an innovator

Although Roger Smalley’s 1992 work Poles Apart has become one of the more notable commissions of the Australia Ensemble, his Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano is new to the group, and its September performance is a certain tribute to this influential composer and educator.

When Roger Smalley arrived in Australia in the 1970s, he brought with him a musical knowledge and set of European experiences that offered a new dimension to the Australian cultural landscape. Born near Manchester, England in 1943 Roger Smalley attended the Royal College of Music where he studied piano with Antony Hopkins and composition with Peter Racine Fricker and John White. He also studied composition privately with Alexander Goehr and later with Karlheinz Stockhausen at the Cologne Course for New Music in 1965.

After an initial visit to Perth in 1974, Smalley moved permanently to Western Australia in 1976 to take up a Research Fellowship at the University of Western Australia on the invitation of Professor Frank Calloway. His position became permanent a few years later when he was asked to replace David Bollard at UWA as Bollard had relocated to Sydney as a member of the Australia Ensemble. Smalley’s position at UWA allowed him to explore his own compositional direction and afforded him the opportunity to influence future generations of Australian composers and performers.

The music department at UWA in the early 1980s was very small with fewer than twenty students in each year group. The small student body meant that orchestral opportunities were limited, and regular performance experiences came from participation in smaller ensembles. The Contemporary Ensemble directed by Roger Smalley was one such group.

The Contemporary Ensemble explored an eclectic array of contemporary music by composers that included Stravinsky, Riley, Reich, Ives, Maxwell-Davies and Souster. Smalley gave the young musicians the opportunity to work with international artists, and instilled in his students an unbridled passion for 20th-century composition. Coupled with the insightful analysis he gave in his lectures, this proved to be a powerful learning experience. Smalley’s skills as an outstanding pianist and conductor were brought to the fore in his position as Music Director for the WA Symphony Orchestra’s New Music Ensemble, and as guest conductor and artist for the WA Youth Orchestra association. Respected Australian composers James Ledger, Lindsay Vickery, Iain Grandage and Christopher Tonkin are among the many that have benefitted from Smalley’s legacy.

Smalley’s musical language has the initial impression of Schoenberg’s 12-tone approach but has evolved to incorporate highly gestural textures and lyrical melodic ideas whilst still remaining true to the modernist ideal. He has written music for a variety of genres including works for solo instruments, chamber groups, orchestral and choral ensembles, and has had works commissioned and broadcast internationally by major performing ensembles and orchestras. In 1994 Smalley was awarded the Australia Council’s prestigious Don Banks Fellowship for his outstanding contribution to Australian music.

In 2007, Smalley was made an Honorary Research Associate at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and, since his move to Sydney, has been a great supporter of the ensemble and its performances.