Several years ago, Ross Edwards’ piece *Barossa Pearl* made its name onto a list of possible works for an Australia Ensemble concert program. It was a quintet dedicated to Edwards’ former teacher, Peter Maxwell Davies, who was composer in residence at the 2000 Barossa Festival where it was first performed. By contacting Ross Edwards to learn more about the piece’s suitability for the Australia Ensemble, it quickly emerged that it was a miniature, only 48 bars in duration, and unfortunately not quite long enough for a subscription concert program.

Australia Ensemble Artistic Chair, Paul Stanhope, had other ideas. He proposed to Edwards that a new work, perhaps a suite, be written for the Australia Ensemble’s 2015 season including the delightful miniature *Barossa Pearl* as one of its movements, for the same colourful combination of instruments. Edwards leapt at the idea, and got straight to work on his five-movement suite, *Animisms*, for flute, clarinet, percussion, violin and cello.

*Barossa Pearl* was reworked to become the first movement, *Bubbles*, as a celebration of affordable student wine, easy on the pocket but tough on the head the following morning. It has been reclaimed and extended in the composer’s words as a “cheerful tribute to my teacher”.

As the final touches were being added to the new piece in 2014, Ross Edwards mentioned to percussionist Claire Edwardes that he had written the percussion part with her in mind. Claire got in touch with the Australia Ensemble, and immediately came on board for the project, having enjoyed a long history with Edwards’ music. Claire noted some features in the new work with which she has become familiar: “I noticed that he has extended the marimba with temple blocks, a clever technique Ross used in his *More Marimba Dances*, which he wrote for me in 2004. There are snippets of this piece which creep in and give *Animisms* a real Ross Edwards colouring.”

Like the shorter *Barossa Pearl*, Edwards has dedicated the new work to composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, with whom he studied at Adelaide’s Elder Conservatorium in the mid-sixties. Studying with him must have been an experience: certainly anecdotal evidence
so many musicians grow up with often admit and the exams and competitions more widespread than we care to ability. In truth, stagefright is much a performer’s talent, dedication or even though it is no indication of that you suffer from stagefright, somehow it’s still taboo to admit pressures of a performance situation.

Somehow it’s still taboo to admit themselves with minimal education musicians are largely left to fend for themselves with minimal education and during every single performance. Experience helps some, but in many cases the problem actually worsens as a performer’s career progresses and the stakes become higher.

Sportspeople spend years learning many forms of mental training (and have done for decades now), yet musicians are largely left to fend for themselves with minimal education about handling the substantial pressures of a performance situation. Somehow it’s still taboo to admit that you suffer from stagefright, even though it is no indication of a performer’s talent, dedication or ability. In truth, stagefright is much more widespread than we care to admit and the exams and competitions so many musicians grow up with often amplify the problem, making it even harder for performers to play with emotional abandon free from the anxiety of being judged.

Fortunately, stagefright doesn’t happen TO us: we do it to ourselves and recognizing the enemy inside is a huge first step towards helping ourselves. It’s also important initially to differentiate between fear and anxiety, both of which can contribute to stagefright:

Fear is a reaction to a real danger. For example, it’s reasonable to be worried about a performance if one is musically ill-prepared. Preparation is key and musical education typically provides strong skills in this area.

Anxiety, however, is an irrational reaction to an imagined danger, one we create in our minds. Anxiety is at the root of much of what we refer to as stagefright and this is where our education is lacking. This anxiety requires a multi-faceted approach, but there is no question that it can be effectively overcome.

Performers can help themselves in a deep and lasting way with a series of self-help techniques borrowed to a large extent from sport psychology, namely: relaxation, imagery, systematic desensitisation and cognitive restructuring techniques combined with a healthy dose of philosophical soul-searching and zen.

Both fear and anxiety often trigger the fight-or-flight response, an ancient physical survival response designed to help us to fight or flee physical danger. Our nervous system ‘means well’ when it triggers this response in our bodies, giving us a burst of adrenalin, taking blood away from the extremities to the big muscles, hastening our breathing and heart-rate to give us extra brute strength for survival. All of this enables us to perform great physical feats, but we lose fine motor control and we are not in a balanced state of emotional ease and openness, all of which makes
Vale Roger Smalley (1943-2015)

It was with great sadness that we received the recent news that composer, pianist and teacher, Roger Smalley, passed away after a long battle with poor health.

British-born Smalley was, in the early 1970s, part of the vibrant modernist set of composers in London, having first studied in Manchester and later with the likes of Karlheinz Stockhausen in Europe. After an invitation from Sir Frank Callaway to teach at the University of Western Australia in 1974, Roger made Australia his base. Moving from one of the centres of the cultural world to one of the world’s most isolated cities was an extraordinary act of courage. From his base in Perth, teaching both composition and piano, Roger was a profound influence on many of his students and on the music scene in Australia in general.

Roger was an extremely fine pianist and conductor in addition to his compositional activities. He performed with the Australian Piano Quartet in the 1990s and the Arensky Piano Trio in the 1970s and 1980s. His first Piano Concerto – in which the composer performed the solo part – was awarded the highly regarded ‘Recommended Work’ prize in the 1987 UNESCO International Rostrum of composers.

The Australia Ensemble is proud to have been associated with Roger and his works, having commissioned Poles Apart (1992) which the ensemble has performed numerous times (most recently in 2008) in Australia as well as for a tour of Japan. The Ensemble also had commissioned him for a new work which, due to deteriorating health, he was unfortunately not able to complete. In our 2014 program, we also included Roger’s smart and spritely Trio for clarinet, viola and piano.

The Ensemble’s pianist, Ian Munro, has worked extensively with Roger Smalley over the years. Roger wrote his stylish Variations on a Theme of Chopin for solo piano especially for Ian. The piece is a re-imagining of a Chopin Mazurka into a remarkable set of variations, setting out a vast tapestry of musical sound. Smalley’s earlier, edgy modernist style had been rounded out by a regard for the Romantic piano repertoire that he performed, while retaining all the creative energy, imagination and rigour of his modernist training.

Reflecting further on the connection between Chopin and Roger’s music, Ian Munro writes:

“Roger has written a number of major chamber works of great power and beauty, which have Chopin’s music as thematic material in one way or another. I count the Piano Quintet of 2003 and the Piano Trio of 1991 among the finest.”

As a sneak preview of our 2016 season, I’m proud to announce that the Australia Ensemble will perform Roger’s Piano Quintet which he composed in 2003. Roger Smalley’s memory will live long through the music he has left us. We look forward to continuing this remarkable legacy long into the future.

Paul Stanhope, Artistic Chair
Greater than the sum of its parts

On a good night, choral music is a buzz unlike anything else. When that final ‘Amen’ rings out into the church or the concert hall, rich with overtones, it makes the heart leap and the soul fly. Especially with a small group of singers performing unaccompanied repertoire, it can be a thrilling meeting of minds with near-limitless expressive possibilities. Whatever the mood – solemn, irreverent or joyous – the existence of the text enables each musician to imbue their performance with their own personal experiences, making for music which is so much greater than the sum of its parts.

The Burgundian Consort at UNSW has offered this world of possibilities to students, staff and community members alike since 1985, when it was created as an elite arm of the Collegium Musicum Choir by Dr Patricia Brown. The chamber choir, which typically contains twelve to eighteen singers, meets once a week to rehearse challenging unaccompanied repertoire and presents an evening recital in September each year where all their hard work comes to fruition. Just a few of the highlights of the last five years have been Aaron Copland’s In the Beginning, Benjamin Britten’s fiendsih Sacred and Profane and Martin Wesley-Smith’s quirky choral opus Who Killed Cock Robin? With such an enormous range of choral delicacies in its repertoire, the annual Burgundian Consort recital is always a memorable highlight of the UNSW choral year.

Entry to the group is based on audition, particularly on each applicant’s ability to sight-read music (no easy task!) and perform in a small group. While there are typically a significant number of undergraduate music students amongst the Consort’s ranks, some of the longest-standing members are drawn from outside the music department. Tenor Sam Hile, for example, is completing his PhD in physics and is currently singing his eighth year in the Burgundian Consort. What keeps him coming back? “Burgundians has been a fantastic way to keep some music in my life,” Sam says. “It’s been great to take a few hours out of my week and switch gears, balance out the music in my life,” Sam says. “It’s been great to take a few hours out of my week and switch gears, balance out the music in my life. It’s been great to take a few hours out of my week and switch gears, balance out the music in my life.” (laughs)

Rehearsing for two hours each week can be a tiring but ultimately rewarding process, with plenty of time for laughs along the way. Sam loves the “just-have-a-crack-at-it” attitude. “The miracle of Gundies is that the first run-through of a piece usually is a pretty good approximation of what it’s supposed to be, and if it’s not, we all have a good laugh at how bad it was!”

Sam singles out Benjamin Britten’s lithe (and very difficult!) Ballad of the Green Broom as one of the many highlights of his time in the Consort. “I really enjoy the challenging works – it’s exhilarating to feel that we’re teetering on the brink of falling into a disatrous mess [this rarely happens – Ed.], especially when the audience is aware of that as well and you can feel everyone holding their breath.” (laughs)

Singing in a small, unaccompanied group also comes pre-packaged with its own unique challenges. “The small ensemble regime,” Sam says, apologising for the physics terminology, “is interesting in that it’s between the extremes of a quartet where you don’t need to worry so much about blending your tone because it’s just you singing the tenor part, and a large choir where you don’t need to worry so much about blending your tone because you are statistically insignificant. It’s been interesting over the years, as I think I’ve had to shift what I would naturally do on my own in different directions to fit with the group as different singers have come and gone.”

Finally, I ask Sam what listeners can expect from this year’s recital, In Love and War, taking place on Wednesday September 23 at 7.30pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium. “It has a rather patriotic feel to it all. In Love and War - it makes sense for war, but even the pieces you’d associate with love, they hold that love up as something to be proud of. If you come to the concert, hopefully you’ll leave feeling uplifted and invigorated.”

Now under the leadership of choral director Sonia Maddock, the Burgundian Consort continues to bring the wonderful world of unaccompanied choral music to musicians and audiences alike. Don’t miss the annual recital in September, in which you’ll hear not only Australia Ensemble pianist Ian Munro, but also the remarkable power of eighteen very different musicians singing in harmony.

Luke Iredale

An apology and an update

Many ladies in our audience were inconvenienced at the August concert by some problems with the bathroom facilities in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium. The problem is an ongoing one requiring substantial work, and the MPU has been assured that a temporary solution will be in place to accommodate our audience for the remaining performances of 2015 until a permanent resolution is achieved. Thank you for your patience, and again we apologise for any inconvenience.

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2016 Australia Ensemble concerts:
Concert 1: Saturday March 19, 2016
Concert 2: Saturday April 16, 2016
Concert 3: Saturday May 14, 2016
Concert 4: Saturday August 13, 2016
Concert 5: Saturday September 10, 2016
Concert 6: Saturday October 15, 2016