

AE News

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble UNSW

Upcoming Events

Australia Ensemble UNSW Subscription Concert 1

Saturday April 10, at 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Dream Tracks

Percy GRAINGER | Three Folk Songs
arr. Griffiths and Young
Peter SCULTHORPE | Dream Tracks
Jean FRANÇAIX | Piano Trio in D major
Carl Maria von WEBER | Clarinet
Quintet in B flat major, Op.34

Performed without interval

David Griffiths, clarinet; Dene Olding,
violin; Dimity Hall, violin; Irina
Morozova, viola; Julian Smiles, cello;
and Ian Munro, piano

Staying Safe at our Concerts

Patrons are encouraged to wear a
mask while inside our foyers and
auditorium, including during the
performance.

Seating is allocated. Groups have been
socially distanced for your safety.
Within the venue, always take your
allocated seat.

As you move around Sir John Clancy
Auditorium, please practise physical
distancing (1.5 meters whenever
possible) and follow the guidance
provided by our staff and signage.

We have regular cleaning of high-traffic
and high-touch areas.

There will be a COVID-19 Safe Officer
at each of our performances.

NSW Health QR Code registration for
all patrons is required. Please see an
usher if you do not carry a mobile and
they will assist with checking you in.

music.unsw.edu.au

2021: A Fresh Start!

Paul Stanhope

As I write, it is exactly a year since the first and last live Australia Ensemble UNSW concert. It was a beautiful concert and the audience particularly warmed to the little known Berwald Septet which was on the program. But already there were apprehensions about the spread of the coronavirus and what its implications would be. As it turned out, they were serious, with border closures for much of the year meaning that the full Ensemble could not play together, even for recordings.



Paul Stanhope, Artistic Chair
Australia Ensemble UNSW

As we know now, it has been a tough year, particularly for the performing arts. I am in admiration of the ensemble members as they adapted to digital broadcasts, giving masterclasses, making recordings and creating education resources, such as composer interviews. These were ways to give back to the UNSW community. I was also very moved that so many subscribers donated back their tickets and also engaged with the online performances.

So it is with great joy that the Australia Ensemble UNSW is returning to the stage in April for a five concert series, having already completed a really interesting week of new music workshops and recordings of recent compositions completed as part of the Layton Emerging Composer Fellowship, and also for the winning piece of the Blakeman National Composition Prize, won by Brooke Green.

Our 2021 season is entitled "A Fresh Start". We have not let 2020 go to waste, and instead this has been a time to reflect on core values and also to performances mostly featuring the permanent members of the ensemble. We have retained a number of major works from the cancelled 2020 programs, such as the elegiac Brahms *Horn Trio*, Beethoven's youthful *Quintet for piano and winds* and the darkly dramatic *Piano Quintet* by Shostakovich, and added to these other masterpieces such as Fauré's first *Piano Quintet* and the Schumann *Piano Quartet*.

Australia Ensemble UNSW programs have always featured gems by lesser-known composers. In continuing this tradition, we honour three fabulous composing women: Lili Boulanger – sister of the famous composition teacher and performer Nadia Boulanger – who died tragically young at the tender age of 24;

Mélanie Bonis, the prolific and gifted French Romantic composer and Australia's own Holly Harrison, whose work *Slipstream* will be premiered in the final concert of the year. I am a big fan of Holly's music and am looking forward to this premiere which was to feature in the last concert of 2020.

We welcome the return of Gordon Kerry's commissioned work from 2016 *while the music lasts*, commissioned by Professor Roger Covell's wife Patricia Brown, as well as the Ensemble's first ever (and most performed!) commission *Café Concertino* by Carl Vine. You can hear an interview between flautist Geoffrey Collins and Carl Vine by visiting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAzetDe62aY&t=945s>

And on news of Geoffrey, after having performed with the Ensemble as a permanent member for 40 years, he is returning in 2021 as an Emeritus Artist. We look forward to his continued valuable contribution to the Ensemble.

Although we were able to bring you some online content in 2020, the absence of live music was a gap that we all yearned for. I know the Ensemble are looking forward to returning to the stage in a COVIDsafe manner that will fill our hearts once more with the beauty of music performed with passion and verve.

New Music Blossoms & Layton Paves the Way

Our musicians returned to campus in March presenting a week of new Australian music. New Music Week at UNSW involved rehearsal and workshops with two Layton Emerging Composer Fellows, Harry Sdraulig and Ian Whitney, exploring their new works and trying new material. The week concluded with a workshop-style performance of Brooke Green's *From The Heart*, the winning entry of the 2019 Blakeman National Composition Prize.

After the Layton workshop we approached composer Ian Whitney about his experience and his new work *Magnolias*.

Tell us about your new work?

Magnolias comes from a period when I was being haunted by images of magnolias. There is a commercial gallery near my home which displayed a photorealistic still life of the flower for several weeks, and then there was, at the time, considerable news coverage of Lafayette Square in Washington, DC. As a former resident of DC, this reminded me of both younger adventures, and the two weeks in May when DC has a lovely Spring when Lafayette Square is almost overcome in fragrance (in my memory this is from magnolias and cherry blossoms but it is very possible that there are not magnolias actually in Lafayette Square!). The piece is also full of happy coincidences: the opening motif quickly took on the characteristics of a flowering bud, and I found a quote by Oscar Wilde for the frontispiece which perfectly captures the spirit of the piece, even though it was found after it was finished.



Ian Whitney

On a more theoretical level, at the time I was very interested in surprise unisons- the piece begins with a solid unison passage but then at various points throughout different combinations of instruments come to the same note before floating or scurrying away again.

As a composer, how critical is the workshop experience in your composition process? Hugely important. A workshop is the only way to truly road test things like balance, overall structure, and how players and audience experience the piece. When you're writing it, you're far too close to it. Bringing in players and a critical audience brings in fresh eyes and ears. Nico Muhly once described a workshop as 'all the bats flying out' which I think is great. The trick is to work out which bats you want to keep and which to let fly away!

What was it like hearing your work

for the first time? It was a great experience. The biggest reconception of the piece is around experiential space: the idea that although I've heard all these ideas hundreds of times, for an audience it will be new and occasionally there are moments where I can let something sit for digestion, or even to bring something back as an aural signpost.

The Music Performance Unit thanks long term supporter Emeritus Professor Roger Layton AM and his family for their continued support of the Layton Emerging Composer Fellowship.

Winners Announced

In March, twelve emerging instrumentalists auditioned for a very exciting opportunity, to perform a concerto with UNSW Orchestra. The overall standard of auditionees was exceptionally high and we congratulate all the instrumentalists that prepared diligently for these auditions.

We are thrilled to announce joint winners: Hikaru Fuminashi, performing Saint-Saëns *Cello Concerto* and Kelly Liu performing Chopin *Piano Concerto No. 1*. Both UNSW students will spend time working closely with conductor Dr. Steven Hillinger on their concertos, and will perform with UNSW Orchestra in 2021. From all of the Music Performance Unit, we congratulate the musicians that



Hikaru Fuminashi & Kelly Liu

took part in the auditions, and thank our dedicated panel, Australia Ensemble UNSW violist Irina Morozova and conductor Dr. Steven Hillinger for their time and expertise.

Meet the Team

Many patrons will have already encountered the delightful Alice Hu while booking tickets this year. Alice has recently stepped into the role of Music Events Assistant and is responsible for coordinating the box office. She also provides support for our events and operations including looking after rehearsal and operational logistics of the Australia Ensemble UNSW. Alice has completed coursework in her Mathematics and Music double degree and is in the process of completing her Music Honours. Out of hours, Alice likes to keep active as an avid netballer, Latin dancer, mathematics tutor and percussionist! We sat down with Alice to see how she is settling into the new role and to tell us a little bit more about herself.

Music and maths often go hand in hand. Can you explain the overlap and what drives your interest in these areas? Yes, I do believe my studies in these two disciplines have complimented each other greatly. In terms of the overlap, there's a great deal! Entire books have been written about the relationship between

mathematics and music! I had the chance to explore mathematical processes in music composition as part of my Musicology stream coursework. It was fascinating to learn about the mathematical tools like set theory which have been harnessed by composers, for example Bach, Schoenberg and Xenakis, to generate and vary musical material.



Alice Hu, Music Event Assistant
Music Performance Unit

As a percussionist and mathematician, not only am I required to do a lot of counting but I do often adopt the same problem-solving mindset. For example, figuring out the optimal instrument set up is based on a set of parameters (the music, the space, the other players,

composer's instructions, etc.) and I often have to experiment in quite a methodical way (as I would in a mathematical proof) to come up with the best solution.

What drove my interest in music and maths was the promise of challenge and constant discovery. Maths is full of wonder and is essential to our understanding of other fields. Music is a universal language that holds lived experiences, history and culture. They are both equally creative and analytic and help connect us with the world around us.

What do you enjoy the most about your role so far at the MPU? I enjoy the community! It is simply lovely to feel like a part of a learning community, and it is quite beautiful to have a role in bringing people together on the UNSW campus to engage and share their love for music!

UNSW Finds Its Voice

Sonia Maddock

Since the Collegium Musicum Choir was founded in 1975, there hasn't been a more disrupted choral year than 2020. After five weeks of rehearsals of Duruflé's splendid *Requiem* and some short works of Fauré, the schedule was cancelled as Australia went into pandemic lockdown. Energies were diverted to ensuring support of the undergraduate music students in the program, as the realisation sunk in that we would not be returning to live singing in Term 2. Singing was quickly flagged by health authorities as a 'high risk behaviour', and the global choral scene all but stopped.

The emergence of the 'online choir' perhaps gave the impression that life was carrying on in a slightly different version of normal, but this title is extremely misleading. Technology enabled our choral ensembles to meet online and engage in person, however the limitations of internet technology make synchronised performance impossible. 'Online choir' then, as we did for the remainder of 2020, involved hours of preparation recording accompaniments and individual vocal lines, editing the audio into useful tracks, and sharing these with the singers to use at home. We convened weekly in an online meeting at which I would teach the singers the individual vocal lines from my home, with my laptop on top of my trusty upright piano, and sharing the accompaniment tracks from my computer. The trick of this was that only one live voice could perform at any one time – while I could sing to them, the singers at home were all on mute, even though they were singing along with me with great gusto. I would also organise them into 'breakout rooms', which was effectively a sectional rehearsal in individual vocal parts. I would visit each room always to find that one of the singers had taken charge, and was working with their choral peers to sing through their part. One of the singers changed their Zoom background each week to a different cathedral he had sung in while in the UK, a favoured talking point among the choir. What quickly became apparent was, although the truly choral experience had been lost, the sense of community was extremely tangible and valued. It

was always a positive and joyful experience, if not a musically satisfying one.

Towards the end of the academic year, I was permitted to have five physically distanced singers outdoors singing together, so did

this with five members of the chamber choir, the Burgundian Consort. Having been online for over seven months, upon singing our Britten *Choral Dances from Gloriana* out loud together in real time, one of the singers was completely overwhelmed and dissolved into happy tears. Such is the joy of real music-making.

In 2021 then, we were hopeful of an in-person choral experience, and the MPU staff worked very hard to conceive a plan for that to happen safely. We juggled the need to adhere to the NSW Health guideline of singers needing to be outdoors and distanced, with the need for a positive musical and educational experience. With different parts of UNSW working cooperatively, we secured an outdoor but undercover terrace space on campus, and for two weeks had split rehearsals outdoors, distanced, and with half of the choir at a time. And finally, the great news that we had a plan approved for us to safely operate indoors in a distanced and controlled environment – the Collegium Musicum Choir has returned to its Clancy Auditorium home, but in the unusual position of singing from the body of the hall rather than the stage. And so the singers came, and they loved hearing each other and being able to share their music again. It is a very different Fauré *Requiem* experience this time around, but perhaps loved all the more since there is a keen awareness of the privilege of being able to sing in person while many of our choral colleagues across the world cannot.



Sonia Maddock, Choral Director



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