



AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Never Stand Still

Music Performance Unit

September Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour concert

Tuesday September 8, 2015

1.10 - 2.00pm

Leighton Hall, Scientia Building

Edwards: *Binyang*

Moszkovski: Suite

Maxwell Davies: Nocturne

Mozart: Trio 'Kegelstatt'

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour workshop

Thursday September 10, 2015

1.10 - 2.00pm

Leighton Hall, Scientia Building

Guitarist Karin Schaupp in a

public masterclass with musicians from UNSW

Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Subscription Concert 5, 2015

Saturday September 12, 2015

8.00pm

Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Maxwell Davies: *Renaissance*

Scottish Dances

Westlake: *Songs from the forest*

Edwards: *Animisms* (first perf.)

Schubert: *Piano Quintet* in A

major D667 'The Trout'

Burgundian Consort

In love and war

Wednesday September 23, 2015

7.30pm

Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Choral works of passion, devotion and remembrance including

Gibbons, Parry, Pärt, Janequin & Jackson

www.music.unsw.edu.au

The creation of a new pearl

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

Composer Ross Edwards
[photo: Bridget Elliot]





Percussionist Claire Edwardes
[photo: Monty Coles]

indicates he is quite the character. He was 'cautioned' in 2005 for the "possession of a swan's corpse", since all swans in the United Kingdom are the property of the Crown. During a visit to Las Vegas, he was temporarily lost - no one seemed able to locate him at any hotel, despite trying 'Maxwell Davies', 'Davies', 'Max' (his informal nickname), 'Sir Peter' and every other possible combination. It was finally discovered that the hotel had registered him as 'Mavis', which inspired the composer to produce the orchestral piece *Mavis in Las Vegas*. Maxwell Davies recently retired as Master of the Queen's Music at the age of 80, a role he declared himself an unlikely choice for as he was a Republican, although, as with so many other 'Republicans' his views changed when he had personal contact with the Queen. Ross Edwards' dedication to his former teacher is for the occasion of his 80th birthday, which was celebrated in September 2014.

Animisms' sources are highly eclectic and contrasted, and the composer describes it as "light but not trite". Edwards intentionally refers to Southeast Asian flavours, indigenous Australian elements with a *maninya* (Australian dance chant) as often used in his music, a lovesong from his 1983 chamber opera *Christina's World*, and the central Madagascan folksong movement of his 1979 sextet *Laikan*, a work well-known to Australia Ensemble audiences.

Greg Keane & Sonia Maddock

Inside the mind game

The house lights go down, an expectant hush falls over the audience and there you are side-stage, peering out from behind the black curtain, wishing it could envelop you so you didn't have to go on stage... Your hands are freezing, your heart is pounding, you're quivering all over, and a deluge of anxious mind chatter tortures you: "What if I fail? What if I have a memory lapse? What if I get stuck in that fast passage? What if the audience doesn't like my performance?"

And the inevitable question: "Why do I do this to myself?"

Almost every performer has experienced some variation of this scene at some point, and many, even seasoned professionals, silently and habitually suffer in this way before 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.



Guest guitarist Karin Schupp is also a researcher in performance anxiety
[photo: Matt Black]

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

musical performance very difficult.

Using relaxation techniques, it's surprisingly easy to learn to consciously control this otherwise automatic nervous system response and thus reduce the physical symptoms of performance anxiety.

As for our subconscious expectations, we can learn to influence these through combining relaxation and imagery techniques in a specific technique called systematic desensitisation, in which we gradually undo our subconscious anxieties around performing. We can use imagery to create perfect, stress-free performances, which will have just as much impact on our nervous system as our real experiences. Sportspeople around the world employ these techniques on a daily basis and the nervous system becomes re-programmed to respond to a performance situation with relaxation, rather than triggering the fight-or-flight response.

The performer's typical torturous mind

chatter can also be reduced through some simple cognitive techniques called cognitive restructuring.

Thus by employing rather basic self-help techniques we can learn to regain control over much of what feels for so many of us uncontrollable.

And once we're free of the cold shaky hands, the mind chatter, the negative expectations, the deep inner doubts and the pounding heart, we can ask ourselves some important questions: "What is musical performance all about? What am I actually doing on stage? Why am I driven to do this and what do I want to give the audience? Am I ready to really let go and to lose my ego and become completely immersed in the music? Can I find an inner sanctuary where the music 'plays itself'?"

We've all seen musical magic on stage, where time appears to stand still. The music almost takes on a life of its own and there is a deep communion between the performer/s and the audience. Sportspeople have

a word for this: they call it "flow", a state where even the most difficult and complex tasks become effortless and the athlete feels completely at one with him/herself and the universe.

I daresay this magical state is the ultimate goal for all musical performers also, the pinnacle of years of hard work and of facing our imagined limitations. It is a place beyond ourselves, beyond our ego, where stagefright becomes deeply irrelevant and we can discover our true calling as vehicles for the beauty of music, that which cannot be properly expressed in words.

Karin Schaupp completed her Masters thesis at The University of Queensland creating a manual for helping performers to overcome musical performance anxiety. She has been invited to lecture on this subject at festivals and tertiary institutions around the world and is currently working on a book for students and professional performers.

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

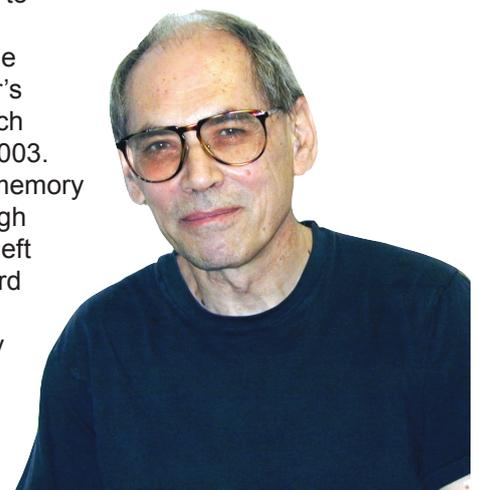
stylish *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* for solo piano especially for Ian. The piece is a re-imagining of a Chopin *Mazurka* into a remarkable set of variations, setting out a vast tapestry of musical sound. Smalley's earlier, edgy modernist style had been rounded out by a regard for the Romantic piano 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 fiendish *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 left brain/right brain, and even just hang out with a different group of people. Musicians and physicists are equally crazy, though." (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!)



Sam Hile, tenor (right), and the Burgundian Consort in performance (above)

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 disastrous 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.

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

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