

# AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

## September Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour concert

**Tuesday September 12, 2017**

**1.10 - 2.00pm**

**Leighton Hall, Scientia Building**

Barber: *Canzone* Op. 38a

Howells: Clarinet Quintet

Weber: Trio for flute, cello and piano

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Subscription Concert 5, 2017

**Saturday September 16, 2017**

**at 8pm**

**Sir John Clancy Auditorium**

***The Sound of Pictures***

hosted by Andrew Ford, including the world premiere of Felicity Wilcox's new work *Vivre sa vie - Composer's Cut*, and works of Ford, Herrmann, Rota, Benjamin and Shostakovich

**7pm: *Composer Conversation with Felicity Wilcox and Paul Stanhope in the UNSW Chancellery Council Chamber, adjacent to Clancy Auditorium. Free, all welcome***

Burgundian Consort

Evening recital

**Wednesday September 20,**

**2017, 7.30-9pm**

**Sir John Clancy Auditorium**

***Musica Dei donum***

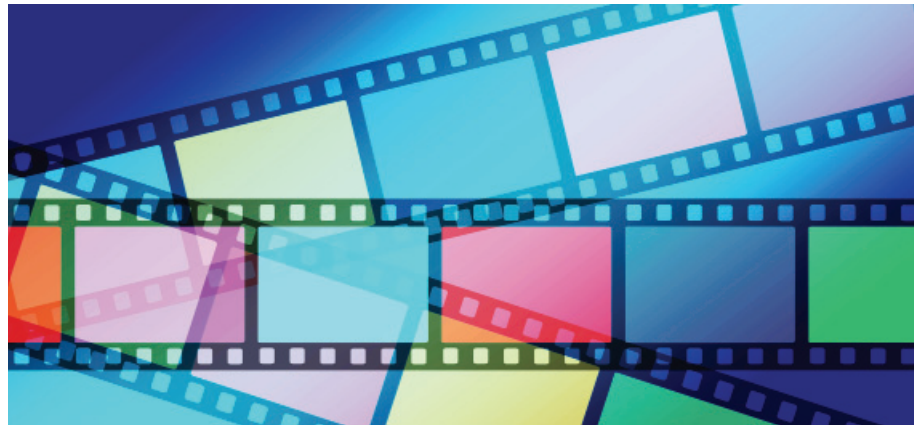
Works by composers including Stanford, Gabrieli, Rutter, Eslava, Lauridsen, and di Lasso, and the premiere performance of the winner of the inaugural Willgoss Choral Composition, Matthew Orlovich's *Sonnet, to the Comet of 1825*

[www.music.unsw.edu.au](http://www.music.unsw.edu.au)

## Sound on screen

JOHN PETERSON

*As the Australia Ensemble embarks on the challenge of a chamber music program of screen composers in The Sound of Pictures, UNSW academic and leading Australian composer, Dr John Peterson, offers some background to the integration of music into film, and the value in its role.*



To a contemporary audience, music is such an important part of the experience of 'going to the movies', that it is hard to imagine that, in the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, music all but disappeared from film. Apart from that used to accompany opening and closing credit sequences, there was no music at all in many films other than that which could be explained by its (diegetic) on-screen presence – a piano player or small band performing in the background of a restaurant or bar scene, for example. Film, as an entertainment medium, had its first public screenings in Paris in 1895, but the focus was on the novelty of the experience. The limitations of the technology surrounding these early films meant that they could show only black and white images, and dialogue and sound effects could not be recorded onto the film itself, so they screened in silence. This shocked many audiences, because the black and white images of people going about their daily business presented something that appeared more 'ghostly' than realistic. Music was, therefore, played by live performers to accompany the film screening and used to calm people's nerves and make the experience more enjoyable, while also covering the noise of the film projector. As films quickly moved towards the presentation of a narrative, music became an integral part of enhancing the viewing experience, creating an empathetic connection between the viewer and the, otherwise silent, characters and events appearing on screen.

Music for 'silent films' was performed live as the film was presented, and it was continuous throughout the entire presentation. The need for 'film music' to reflect the emotions of characters on-screen meant that musical cliché soon became common: slow sombre music for death scenes, and fast music for chase scenes were typical examples of the time, but to a certain extent remain so even today.

With the advent of technology that allowed dialogue and sound effects to be recorded onto film stock, and thus heard by the audience, many directors found that music had no place in film and did not understand how it could interact with spoken dialogue. Music that could be heard, but whose physical presence could not be explained (non-diegetic music), thus proved to be problematic, such that many films in the early 1930s had no music at all.

Max Steiner's orchestral score for *King Kong* (1932) went a long way towards convincing directors that the presence of off-screen music in a film, even one set in the jungle, did not need to be explained, it could simply be used to amplify aspects of the spectacle being presented. More importantly, perhaps, because Steiner's orchestral score was so bombastic and colourful, it allowed audiences to ignore the unrealistic fantasy elements (a gigantic ape fighting gigantic dinosaurs!) and focus on engaging and empathising with the characters and their situations (we still cry when Kong is attacked at the end of the film).

Steiner's methods for composing film music were, and remain, extremely influential, and he set the standards for what followed and, since the 1930s,

film music has developed in any number of ways. Although orchestral music remained the standard form of the film score, other genres of music have been used: jazz-styled music in *Laura* (1944), for example, but also experiments with purely electronic scores appeared in *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and *The Birds* (1963). The 1960s also saw the advent of the so-called 'compilation' score, comprised of either popular songs used to reflect the narrative or to form direct associations with the period in which the film is set (*Easy Rider*, 1969, *American Graffiti*, 1973), or excerpts of existing classical music (*2001 A Space Odyssey*, 1967).

Despite the many different styles and genres of film music that currently exist, the orchestral score is still a standard device used by many film composers, especially those writing for more spectacular film scenarios: films such as the *Star Wars* series, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* trilogies, are all excellent examples of orchestral scores being used to their very best advantage in large-scale films that focus on fantasy and epic storytelling (just as *King Kong* did in 1932).

Music in several recent films has moved towards a more electronic-based, and electronically manipulated, music that interacts with the images in ways that add to the immersive nature of the film experience. In this we can see not only a continuation but also an extension of the essential symbiotic relationship that has existed between music and film from the very beginning in 1895: when both work well together it can be a transfixing and transforming experience for the audience.

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## Felicity rides The New Wave

GREG KEANE

Felicity Wilcox is an interdisciplinary composer whose output encompasses concert music, film music, music for theatre, installation, live events, dance and radio and has a PhD in composition from Sydney Conservatorium with a focus on concert music for combined media. She is excited about the upcoming premiere performance of a new work commissioned by the Australia Ensemble as part of its 'The Sound of Pictures' program.

"The process of expanding and diversifying my role happened when I started my PhD in 2008, and I was already well underway with alternative projects when the Australia Ensemble's Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope discussed the idea of re-imagining a film score from scratch.

"I trawled through various film genres including quite esoteric material from 1920s animation to early short

films by Australian women filmmakers.

"Finally, I decided to tackle an example of what is now considered a more mainstream genre, the French *Nouvelle Vague* or 'New Wave'," Felicity said.

The New Wave emerged in the late 1950s as a cinematic movement which reacted against the conventional cinematic industry culture of corporate studios where directors were often mere employees, subject to interference from studio executives and influenced by traditional social mores.

It favoured a new aesthetic where directors became *auteurs*, with responsibility for the entire look, feel and overall mood of the film, where it achieved the same creative status as a novel or painting.

Plots often featured off-beat, unconventional, even

marginalised personalities leading emotionally chaotic lives and rebelling in varying degrees against bourgeois “oppression”. The characters were usually young and often projected a prominent but nonchalant sexual allure. Production techniques were more economical, with less elaborate editing, less rehearsal and an emphasis on more spontaneous acting.

Although not the founder of the New Wave, its most famous figure, along with Francois Truffaut, was the now-86-year-old Jean-Luc Godard and it was his classic *Vivre sa Vie* (My Life to Live) that Felicity settled on for her work.

“Trying to obtain copyright permission (because it was less than 70 years old) initially went nowhere but, after what I imagined would be a final email, Godard’s assistant replied, giving the great man’s blessing to the project, having been assured that it was not a commercial undertaking and would probably only receive one performance”.

The 85-minute 1962 film starred Godard’s then wife (and muse) Anna Karina and is an “out of the frying pan into the fire” tale of a woman longing to escape a mundane existence in an unhappy marriage and the brutal price she pays for her doomed search for fulfillment.

“The greatest challenge was to capture the essence of the work and condense the visual and the score into a mere 15 minutes of excerpts, while retaining the narrative thrust.

“I decided to create twelve vignettes from the film, each one of which contained a salient detail.



*Composer Felicity Wilcox uses scenes from the film *Vivre sa vie* by Jean-Luc Godard (below left) for her new work for the Australia Ensemble.*



***Composer Felicity Wilcox will be part of a Composer Conversation with Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope on Saturday September 16 at 7pm the Council Chamber of the UNSW Chancellery - free entry, all are welcome.***

***Felicity’s new work *Vivre sa vie* - Composer’s Cut will be performed in the subscription concert on Saturday August 19 at 8pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW.***

“Godard structured the film in twelve vignettes and I strove to retain that structure, reducing each segment considerably and creating a score in twelve movements.

“I also tried to preserve the rhythm, pace, emotion and mood while avoiding footage which shows the actors speaking as much as possible .

“I used an alto flute to “voice” the female character and a bass clarinet for all the male characters. Where the narrative was advanced through dialogue I inserted my own subtitles to ensure clarity.

“Some of the music is crazy, with unusual time signatures like 12/8 becoming 11/8 then 10/8 etc to describe a feeling of someone on a sinister merry-go-round unable to get off.

“By contrast, for the Joan of Arc scene (taken from a silent 1928 depiction directed by Carl Dreyer,) where Godard draws parallels between the fate of the French saint and the main character, Nana - I composed a theme that contains the simplicity and purity of a hymn, and which attempts to capture the very soul of the film,” she added.

# The gift of music in every sense

SONIA MADDOCK

Each year, UNSW's Burgundian Consort presents an evening recital in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium in mid- to late-September, a short program of unaccompanied choral works which loosely fit together under a particular theme. This format has given the chamber choir opportunity to take on some truly challenging works in past years, including Allegri's *Miserere mei, Deus*, Britten's *Sacred and Profane*, Copland's *In the beginning*, and Martin Wesley-Smith's *Who killed Cock Robin?*

Although the group's membership changes every year, the shifts tend to be incremental, with some members having been involved for around ten years. One of these is Richard Willgoss, who joined the Burgundian Consort while taking on a Bachelor of Music as a mature-age student, also continuing his lecturing role in Science and Engineering. Richard has been a dedicated



Members of the Burgundian Consort worked with composer Matthew Orlovich (front right) on his new work, as the result of the prize supported by Richard Willgoss (back right) and his wife Sue.

member of the group (and a reliable source of low notes), and in recent years he and his wife Sue have taken the step to support the choral program even further, through the establishment of a suite of prizes. In 2016, the first recipients of the Willgoss Choral Prizes were announced at the annual Festival of Carols, a member each of the Burgundian Consort and Collegium Musicum Choir awarded \$1000 for their contribution throughout the year. The prizes will be on offer again in 2017 with the addition of a \$250 Highly Commended prize for each choir.

Additionally, the inaugural Willgoss Choral Composition Prize was launched in 2016 and announced in March this year. As part of the prize, the winning work is scheduled to receive its premiere performance in the Burgundian Consort's evening recital, on Wednesday September 20 at 7.30pm. Composer Matthew Orlovich came in to work with the Burgundian Consort singers on his winning work, *Sonnet, to the comet of 1825*, and was thrilled with its progress. "I am really enamoured of the choir's sound ... It is a pleasure to work with such a talented and friendly group of choristers!"

The work will form a very important part of this year's program, entitled *Musica Dei donum*, or 'Music is a gift from God'. This statement is reflected in every element of the occasion, from the exceptional gifts shown by the seventeen singers of the group, to the music itself (which includes both Clemens non Papa's and Rutter's settings of the text *Musica Dei donum*), and of course the extraordinary gift of a new work made possible by a gift from very generous supporters.

*The Willgoss Choral Composition prize 2017-18 is currently open with applications accepted until 31 January 2018. For more details and application procedures, please refer to the website: [www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral](http://www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral)*

**The Burgundian Consort's evening recital *Musica Dei donum* is on Wednesday September 20, 7.30-9pm in the Clancy Auditorium. Tickets are available online [\$14/\$7 plus booking fee] <http://www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral/tickets> or by calling 93854874 or 93855243.**