

AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Upcoming Events

Roger Covell Memorial
Tuesday 10 September, 5.30pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Free and all welcome
Register online at
music.unsw.edu.au

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Saturday 14 September, 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Heart * Beat
Wells | Heartbeat
Ibert | Deux Interludes
Brahms | Clarinet Trio Op.114
Mendelssohn | String Quintet
no.2 Op.87
*Pre-concert Composer Conversation
with Jessica Wells, 7pm in the foyer*

Burgundian Consort Recital
Friday 27 September, 7.30pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Sing Ye Praises
includes Australian works by
Stanhope, Orlovich and Twist,
as well as the world premiere of
Ronan Apcar's *Preludes*, winner
of the 2019 Willgoss Choral
Composition Prize.

Symposium of Australian
Arts Organisations
Wednesday 2 October, 6.30pm
City Recital Hall, Angel Place
The Australian Brandenburg
Orchestra is hosting a special
Symposium of Australian Arts
Organisations to celebrate
the extraordinary impact arts
organisations have had on the
cultural life of the nation. This
conversation will feature artistic
directors and leaders of six
major Australian performing
arts organisations who are
celebrating significant milestones
in 2019.

www.music.unsw.edu.au

Getting to the heart of it

*The Australia Ensemble's fifth subscription concert is entitled Heart * Beat, a theme to which Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope asked Jessica Wells to write a new piece. We asked Jessica to tell us a little bit about her background as a composer and about her work Heartbeat, due for its premiere performance.*



"I'm so lucky to be able to work across many genres of music! Just this year I have written music for a silent film from 1913, a piece for carillon, soprano and electronic track, a song cycle about the endangered Night Parrot for the Queensland Music Festival, and a chamber work inspired by the Ballet

Russes for saxophone and string quartet for Amy Dickson. Last year I wrote music for ABC TV's new show *Dream Gardens* which will be aired at the end of October. I absolutely love working in the recording studio, as an orchestrator, arranger and music producer. I get a big thrill out of making other composer's music sound great, and through this process I have learned so much about the craft of composition from many, varying perspectives. I have always viewed commercial work as a valuable means to hone my skills as a composer, and not just putting food on the table. Working with so many passionate music makers is a dream job!

Paul Stanhope's program of *Heart * Beat* was such an interesting combination that I took it very literally and wrote a piece about actual human heartbeats! The piece is in three main sections which investigate the tempo of human hearts in different states of being. The opening section has three tempos (quite quick) which are typical of a growing fetus. The baby's tiny heartbeat is in the centre of a lot of kaleidoscopic movement, depicting the growing and multiplying cells, the magic of human development. The second section explores the slow heart rate of deep sleep and the fluctuation of REM sleep where we dream. The third section explodes, as do our hearts when we first fall in love! It's like a freight train bearing down on you, and there are references to that in the music.

Having been to see the Australia Ensemble perform many times I know that the technical capability of the musicians is scarily virtuosic, so in some ways I felt free to write what I liked knowing that they would be able to perform it. On the flip side I didn't want my piece to be all about technique, it needed to be "me" and have my voice shine through. So the challenge was to know that I had achieved a balance of those two elements, the thrill and the beauty. Composers often second-guess themselves, and self-doubt is something to push aside over and over again and just keep plugging away until I just have to stop and say "well, it is what it is!" and then give it over to the musicians with trepidation! Hoping that they enjoy the piece is paramount to me as a composer, if they do then that will transcend to the audience."

Sound engineering

In Term 2, the Music Performance Unit popped up on campus in an exciting and unexpected way. Approached by Dr Jose Bilbao from the School of Photovoltaics & Renewable Energy Engineering about collaborating with the MPU, Choral Director Sonia Maddock began working with a cohort of photovoltaics engineering students, teaching them how to sing and work together in a choir. Over the term, Sonia Maddock delivered ten



15-minute singing sessions with a short public performance held at the end of semester as part of their final academic presentation. In the weekly sessions, students were encouraged to work together, listen to each other and to engage with their student peers and community in a new way. The philosophy behind the collaboration was to improve the students' focus and wellbeing, increase community spirit, and to challenge themselves with something unfamiliar and new. The Music Performance Unit was thrilled to partner with the School in this way, and look forward to continuing our relationship with them into the future.

Musical chairs

Ensemble places now open - UNSW Orchestra, Choir & Wind Symphony

Are you an instrumentalist or a singer, and did you know we have subscribers in our ensembles at UNSW? We are now accepting new members into our ensembles program for Term 3. UNSW Orchestra, Wind Symphony and the Collegium Musicum Choir will recommence rehearsals in the week commencing September 16, 2019.

The Music Performance Unit's ensembles are open to the public, staff and students, with only the orchestra by audition. Wind Symphony and Choir are not auditioned, however a short voice placement for choir is required.

If you are keen to partake in one of these ensembles and join a wonderful community of musicians and singers that rehearse weekly on campus, please contact the Music Performance Unit via cmc@unsw.edu.au.

At the end of each semester a public concert is held in Sir John Clancy Auditorium to showcase the hard work and dedication of the members over the course of the term. We strongly encourage those keen to find out more, to get in touch with the unit or to register their interest online at music.unsw.edu.au



Paying tribute

A last reminder of the opportunity for all to pay tribute to the life and legacy of Emeritus Professor Roger Covell by joining us for a memorial celebration on **Tuesday 10 September, 5.30pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium**. The occasion will include performances by the Australia Ensemble, alumni of UNSW's choral program, and pianist Dr Christine Logan, and recollections from colleagues and peers Professor Dorottya Fabian, Professor Barry Conyngham, and Andrew Ford.

All are welcome, and encouraged to register online music.unsw.edu.au or call (02) 9385 4874.

Australia Ensemble - the sum of its parts

Genevieve Lang

There was an air of inevitability about David Griffiths and his chosen instrument. “The” clarinet teacher in Armidale? His mum. ‘She taught an enormous number of students, often 100 in any given week!’ David says he was extremely competitive when it came to his own clarinet lessons, and not altogether pleasant to teach. ‘Mum sent me off to learn with one of her advanced students, because she knew I’d listen to them more than I would to her.’ As with many country kids, learning an instrument to an advanced level was a whole-family commitment. ‘Mum would drive me to Brisbane or Sydney,’ – seven hours in either direction – ‘so that I would have the same opportunities that city kids had.’

Maternal dedication paid off: Formative experiences with the Australian Youth Orchestra and later the Pacific Music Festival, working with the likes of Christoph Eschenbach and Michael Tilson Thomas to an extraordinarily high standard – ‘Holy crap, what am I doing here?’ – elevated David’s desire and confidence to pursue the clarinet – ‘Oh yeah, I can probably do this.’ Soon after, he was off to New York for post-graduate studies.

Returning to Australia several years later, David made Melbourne home. It wasn’t long before he popped up on Australia Ensemble’s radar. ‘They invited me to join them for a program and I was devastated when I couldn’t do it. I’d grown up listening to these guys.’ When a second invitation a year later manifested which also clashed with a prior commitment, David moved heaven, earth, and a concert date with Monash University in order to be able to take up the opportunity.

The repertoire? Berg’s trio for clarinet, violin and piano and Webern’s arrangement of Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony. ‘Two really hard major works. I remember being absolutely terrified because I saw this as a kind of trial with the group and I wanted to absolutely do my best.’ The musicians of the Australia Ensemble were intimately acquainted with both pieces, particularly the Schoenberg, having performed it previously on tour and committed it to disc. Fortunately for David, the Schoenberg was also something he had spent six months nutting out with an ensemble back in New York. ‘I hadn’t played it for 20 years, but I really understood who plays where, what was important, the way the whole thing fits together. And it’s really not obvious with that piece!’

First impressions count, and David clearly left a positive one, with an immediate repeat invitation for the next AE concert, and then the one after that, and pretty soon he found himself a permanent member of the group. ‘What I love about it is the really high expectations of the group. It’s very much what I expect of myself, and that’s why I think I fit in.’



David Griffiths and his many clarinets

A special opportunity

Join us for a special evening featuring David Griffiths’ **Ensemble Liaison** performing alongside French-Serbian violinist **Nemanja Radulović** on Saturday October 26, 7pm in Sir John Clancy Auditorium.

Performing works by Bach, Handel, Khachaturian, Brahms and more, this one-off performance will have you on the edge of your seat. Nemanja has taken the classical world by storm through his adventurous and dynamic programming. Don’t miss out on this thrilling opportunity! For more information, go to music.unsw.edu.au or call the box office on 9385 4874.



For the calendar... our 2020 season

Although the 2020 season of the Australia Ensemble will be officially launched at our final 2019 concert on October 12, we are pleased to announce our 2020 Australia Ensemble subscription season dates. Please put these in your calendar and hold the dates!

Concert 1: Saturday March 14, 2020

Concert 2: Saturday April 18, 2020

Concert 3: Saturday May 30, 2020

Concert 4: Saturday August 15, 2020

Concert 5: Saturday September 26, 2020

Concert 6: Saturday October 24, 2020

On tour with ASPIRE - Gilgandra NSW

In July, the Music Performance Unit joined UNSW's ASPIRE team to deliver music workshops in Gilgandra, country NSW. ASPIRE is an award-winning outreach program working in communities where there are low numbers of school students who go on to university, aiming to help students discover the options available to them when they leave school, and envisioning university as a reasonable possibility. The **ASPIRE School Holiday program** is a two-day academic enrichment opportunity for Years 4 to 8, held in regional NSW. Students participate in coding, sport, science, art and music to discover the possibilities outside their environment and increase awareness of skills and interests. MPU's Operations and Communications Assistant and accomplished performer Alex Siegers delivered three music sessions over two days to approximately one hundred and fifty students from Year 4 through to Year 7. Alex led workshops of body percussion and singing which culminated in a community performance.

Alex described her time in Gilgandra for us. 'With students hailing from Gilgandra High, Gilgandra Public, St Joseph's and Gulargambone Central Schools, deciding on a 75-minute workshop activity for what was inevitably going to be an incredibly diverse group of students was a challenge. I wanted to find a way of engaging these students whether they had been exposed to classical music or not; whether they had knowledge of music theory or not; whether they enjoyed singing or not; and whether they had played an instrument before or not.'

The students learned *Hey Yo* by Australian composer Lisa Young, which is based on an Indian vocal percussion called *konnakol*. The piece combines singing with vocal percussion. Alex added they 'also learned how to play rhythms on several different hand percussion instruments while they sang'. The main goal of the sessions was to pull together a performance of the *Ten Step Sasa*, a sequence of ten body percussion patterns which increase in difficulty from one to ten. 'I wasn't sure that the groups would be able to memorise all ten steps in one session, but the students absolutely blew me away. It was wonderful seeing children practising their body percussion on their lunch breaks and excitedly showing their siblings at the end of the day. We also discussed different ways that music can be a part of your life after school: studying a music degree, joining a music club or society, joining a community music group, or watching a concert.' Thank you to ASPIRE for letting the Music Performance Unit be part of the journey of these students.



What are you listening to this month?

Subscribers may have noticed the ABC recording team on stage at the Australia Ensemble concert on 17 August. If you happened to miss this concert or would like to listen to it again, this performance will be broadcast on ABC Classic FM on September 3 at 1.00 pm.