

AE News

September 2020

What's Online

Harp in Chamber Music

Alice Giles, harpist has released a CD with the Australia Ensemble UNSW including Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* and Debussy's *Sonata for flute, viola and harp*.

Available online:

alicegiles.com

AE Flashback - Our Support Of The Arts, Uniken, 13 October 1989

music.unsw.edu.au/our-support-arts-uniken-13-october-1989

Melbourne Digital Concert Hall

melbournedigitalconcerthall.com/

Cancellation of Concerts

The September, October and November 2020 Subscription and Free Lunch Hour performances of the Australia Ensemble UNSW have been cancelled. All ticket holders will be contacted by the Box Office.

For more information email:

australia.ensemble@unsw.edu.au



Partners in joy

Eleasha Mah, Team Leader

With classes resuming at the University for Term 3, the Music Performance Unit and Hospitality UNSW's joint partnership with Melbourne Digital Hall has come to a close.

We were delighted to be able to play a small role over the past three months in supporting Melbourne Digital Concert Hall to present concerts, enabling leading musicians from Sydney to perform online for audiences around the country. As venue partner, we hosted Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, providing Sir John Clancy Auditorium for each of their Sydney events. In this time, we were also fortunate to welcome the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts The Honourable Paul Fletcher to campus. In early August, he received an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at how Melbourne Digital Concert Hall operated while at UNSW.



During the three month partnership, the Australia Ensemble UNSW was also featured by Melbourne Digital Concert Hall on two occasions. If you missed it, at the end of July, David Griffiths and Ian Munro were live streamed from the Melbourne Athenaeum to homes around the country.

In mid-August the strings of the Australia Ensemble UNSW, the Goldner String Quartet, had their chance to perform online and streamed to an audience of around 350 ticket holders, straight from our very own Sir John Clancy Auditorium. Julian Smiles began the concert with the premiere performance of Ross Edwards' solo cello movement *Orison* from *Vespers for Mother Earth*, delighted to be able to continue the Ensemble's commitment to new Australian music.



Both concerts were met with praise and we received wonderful feedback from patrons who tuned in on the night.



Whilst this initial partnership has now come to a close, we will continue to look for opportunities to support Melbourne Digital Concert Hall's events from afar. This exciting platform has been a source of hope for many musicians across the country that have been deeply challenged by the current pandemic.

By now you would be aware that the Australia Ensemble UNSW will not be returning to Sir John Clancy Auditorium for public concerts in 2020, as the University has cancelled public events for the remainder of the year. If you haven't already, we encourage you to consider tuning into Melbourne Digital Concert Hall for a night of classical music and to help support musicians of this country. All ticket fees go direct to the musicians, many of whom are currently without work.

Finally we want to say a big thank you to Melbourne Digital Concert Hall's Co-directors Chris Howlett and Adele Schonhardt for their incredible vision, energy that they bring to these events, and for providing a platform for our musicians to perform. We are, and indeed the whole music community is, indebted to them.

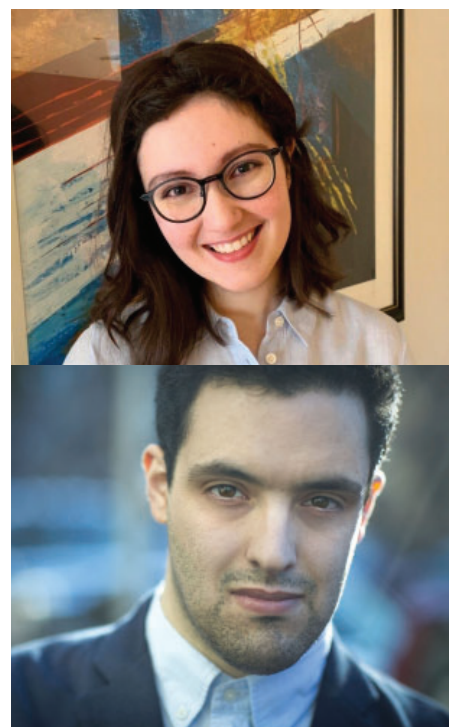
Willgoss reimaged for a pandemic

With the Music Performance Unit's community ensembles forced online during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Willgoss Choral and Instrumental Prizes didn't seem to have a home in 2020. However, donors Richard and Sue Willgoss were determined to continue to support these ensembles, and worked with the MPU to conceive a new composition prize in response to this unprecedented situation. Composers were invited to submit a portfolio of work and outline their concept for a short new original work, for one of UNSW's community ensembles.

In August, the Music Performance Unit announced Elizabeth Younan and Michael Grebla as joint winners of the Willgoss Ensemble Composition Prize for 2020. These composers each receive a \$2500 prize and are commissioned to compose an original, short ensemble work - Elizabeth for brass and percussion ensemble, and Michael for string ensemble. The works will be performed in the 2021 season by members of UNSW Orchestra and UNSW Wind Symphony.

Both Elizabeth Younan and Michael Grebla (pictured) are emerging composers with an increasingly international reach. Although Elizabeth is Sydney-based, having undertaken bachelors and masters degrees in composition at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, she currently studies as an artist diploma student under full scholarship at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where she holds the Jimmy Brent Fellowship. Michael heralds from Western Australia and is now based in New York City. His work has been performed internationally at festivals including the Atlantic Music, Connecticut Summerfest, Charlotte New Music and TUTTI festivals, and performed by ensembles such as Ethel, Beo, Hub New Music, the Australian Youth Orchestra and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

For more information about these composers, please visit our website. We look forward to sharing these prize-winning works in 2021, and celebrating new music face-to-face.



Smiles all round as our musicians head online!

Alex Siegers, Operations and Communications Assistant

Members of the Australia Ensemble appeared in concert with the Melbourne Digital Concert Hall in July and August. Here, UNSW cellist Julian Smiles talks about his Melbourne Digital Concert Hall debut experience with pianist Kathryn Selby.

How was the MDCH 'concert day' experience different to a regular subscriber concert at Clancy Auditorium?

As there were in fact two digital concerts that evening, we had a prescribed period to come in (hand sanitiser at the door) and occupy our positions. These had been measured out to ensure we weren't too close. We did a bit of rehearsal while the cameras and sound recording equipment was adjusted. We were on stage up to three minutes before the 'concert', then walked out of shot ready for the beginning.

How did it feel performing in an almost (physically) empty Clancy Auditorium?

Obviously it was a very different feel to be giving a committed concert to an empty hall, but when one considers rehearsals before our regular concerts I have in fact played more in an empty Sir John Clancy Auditorium than one with an audience. We only found out several days before that this concert would be hosted at the Sir John Clancy Auditorium and it was wonderful to be playing in a good acoustic with which I was very familiar. Standing off camera waiting for a silent countdown was a bit weird, and we didn't know what to do at the end and slunk off (this prompted responses from friends and family as to what we could have done better).

As far as the actual performance felt I was very aware that as a live-streamed concert there was an audience out there. I found myself, to my surprise, enjoying the experience as much as if the audience had been physically present.

What do you think about Melbourne Digital Concert Hall and other online initiatives striving to make classical music more accessible?

This has been an incredible gift for performers. Apart from a welcome bit of income the opportunity to still express yourself as an artist is something I didn't know I was missing so much until I gave the performance.

There are many many short music videos made by performers in their living rooms, but the MDCH performances give both performer and audience the sense of an actual formal concert. I actually see a lot of value in streamed concerts, and I don't think it would be a bad thing if when life returns to normal we have somewhat more of them in the mix.

Have you watched any digitally streamed performances at home? What have been your favourites?

True confession: I'm afraid I haven't watched any. I'm so ashamed, but I find it hard to watch a performance without my analysis brain switching on, and the mood of these last few months have lead me to prefer to curl up on the sofa with my family and dogs and watch bad television.

What are you most looking forward to doing when public performances are able to resume?

I've missed rehearsing with my colleagues a lot. I love the performing and interaction with an audience, of course, but the hours of artistic discussions and technical polishing that go into presenting a single piece of music on stage are hours I find stimulating and exciting.



A Shared Plank

Yvette Goodchild, violist and Operations & Artistic Coordinator

Owning a violin or viola made by A.E. Smith is to many Australian 'fiddle' players akin to winning the string instrument lottery. They are highly prized and rarely available for purchase since their current 'guardians' are reluctant to part with them.

Arthur Edward Smith was from London and trained initially in engineering design, working as a fitter and turner then progressing to be a senior design draughtsman. Being an amateur violinist in the local Maldon Amateur Orchestral Society, his love for string instruments blossomed and brought about a change of career. Seemingly a self-taught luthier he emigrated to Australia where after a short stay in Melbourne saw him relocate to Sydney, establishing his shop in 1915 in Hunter Street, coincidentally the same year the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music was opened. Internationally renowned for the quality and craftsmanship of his violins and violas, they were purchased by players including Yehudi Menuhin, David Oistrakh, Isaac Stern and Ruggiero Ricci. His violas were a more guarded secret, with most staying within Australia being played in our then State ABC orchestras.

Many professional violinists and violists from the Sydney Symphony Orchestra played on or owned an A.E. Smith instrument, and at one time nearly the entire viola section owned one.



Irina Morozova & Dene Olding with their A.E. Smith instruments, 1984

I too once owned a wonderful Smith, built in 1947 for an international luthier competition, which was then briefly owned by the then SSO concertmaster Ernest Llewellyn, and soon after by SSO violist Helen Bainton who performed on it for many years within the orchestra. It then moved to Townsville with Peter Wilson, heading back to Sydney into my own hands for many years, before relocating to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in the hands of Katharine Brockman, then Principal Violist. The lineage of such instruments is always a fascination, a bit like researching your family tree!



Yvette Goodchild with her Smith viola

Australia Ensemble UNSW members Dene Olding and Irina Morozova are both current owners of Smith instruments. Irina uses her Smith viola exclusively whereas Dene now performs on his Joseph Guarnerius violin. Both of their Smith instruments came from the same piece of timber, apparently from the Crystal Palace, where a show for 'particularly fine old Italian wood for the making of instruments' had been on display.

I had also been advised that my Smith viola (made in 1947) originated from the Crystal Palace wood, although I am not sure to its accuracy. At the time, being young, I had incorrectly imagined the wood came from the charred remains of that great architectural wonder after its devastating fire in 1936. Every time I opened my viola case I liked to think I could catch the faintest whiff of singed wood!

Dene's Smith Violin

Dene's Smith violin was made in 1938 for the Concert Master of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Ernest Llewellyn (Concertmaster from 1949–1964).

"The story I know", Dene comments, "is that this violin was a wedding present for Ernest Llewellyn, who married A.E. Smith's daughter Ruth and was therefore his son-in-law. Smith took extra care in making this violin and it remains one of his outstanding instruments."

In 1987 Dene purchased the Smith violin from Llewellyn's widow Ruth and joined the SSO permanently as its new Concertmaster performing with the Smith until 2000 when he co acquired his Joseph Guarnerius, a violin he currently plays.

"The fact that I also held this position (SSO Concertmaster) and for many years and used the Smith violin in the orchestra as well, is a nice link with the history of the orchestra", Dene reflects.

Prior to the Smith purchase, Dene had been playing on a fine Gagliano, which is coincidentally not far away. In fact you hear its fine melodious tone at our Australia Ensemble UNSW concerts in the hands of Dimity Hall.



*The backs of the A.E. Smith instruments owned by Irina Morozova & Dene Olding show a similarity in grain pattern
[photo: Dene Olding]*

I asked Dene if there were particular performances with the Smith that were memorable or important to him.

"I played many concerts with this instrument. Recordings of Samuel Barber's *Violin Concerto* with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and conductor Hiroyuki Iwaki and *Maninyas* by Ross Edwards, with the Sydney Symphony and conductor Stuart Challender, I think, show very well the quality of

sound that it possesses. I played so many concerts of all kinds with this violin but I especially enjoyed playing concertos on it because of its power. Inevitably, musicians would ask me what instrument I played and many were amazed to find out it was a Smith!"

"Once, when Igor Oistrakh was playing Shostakovich's *Violin Concerto* with the Sydney Symphony, he broke a string and he had to swap violins with me and play the last movement on my Smith whilst I restrung and played his father's (David's) beautiful Strad for the duration of the piece as there was no chance to swap back. He told me later that it brought back memories for him as his father had a Smith violin and he often played it in an early stage of his career. He was most complimentary about the sound of my violin."

"It was fitting that I often played double concertos such as Mozart's *Sinfonie Concertante* and Arthur Benjamin's *Romantic Fantasy* with my wife, Irina and her beautiful Smith Viola."

Today, Dene still owns his Smith, so I wondered if it was still being played?

"I have lent it out for a short period to SSO violinist, Alex Mitchell, but I usually keep it for my own use."

Each string instrument carries its very own individual fine qualities and I asked Dene if he could please share some of the qualities of his particular Smith violin.

"This violin is notable for its extra rich, mezzo soprano qualities. It is a Guarneri del Gesu model and as such, it is shorter and wider than the usual Stradivari pattern. Ernest Llewellyn had large hands and the fingerboard is consequently built for his hands in its width."

All string instruments being unique, also unfortunately carry their own set of peccadillos. I asked Dene whether his Smith had any such niggles that having played it for so many years, only he would know.

"Because of the unusual width of the waist part around the C curves, one has to be careful when playing on the E string not to hit the wood of the violin with the bow. Some registers have pure horsepower and the challenge there is to blend with other instruments so that you do not stick out unexpectedly and dominate the balance when it is not called for."

Irina's Smith Viola

Having sat next to Irina on many occasions in orchestras, chamber music and the occasional UNSW Opera performance, I would wallow in the glorious warmth and dark chocolatey sound she made. I was entranced and fascinated, how did she produce that glorious sound and what was her instrument?

Yes, Irina owned a hallowed Smith. It was made in 1947 for Richard Goldner, violist, inventor and founder of Musica Viva, who was also Irina's viola teacher and mentor. Richard was so happy with the sound when it was being built that he stopped Smith from applying the final coat of varnish.

"Richard played it all over Australia and possibly in New Zealand while he was the violist for the Musica Viva Chamber Players for his own Musica Viva. Although forced to stop performing due to a shoulder injury, he used to haul the viola out during my viola lessons to demonstrate all sorts of bowings, proving that your bow arm NEVER forgets - providing you were



*Dene Olding & Irina Morozova
with their
A.E. Smith instruments,
Sydney Opera House 1993*



Irina Morozova with her A.E. Smith viola, 1994

taught properly! Alas – a different thing for the left hand!”

I asked Irina if she would mind recounting the wonderful tale of how she came to own her Smith viola.

“I had purchased my lunchbox viola (a post-stroke Smith viola from 1966 which looked terrible; unevenly carved and varnished with what looked like beetroot stains-obviously not!) at the age of 16 for the princely sum of \$300 (including case and bow). It was only a 16 inch viola so you had to work very hard to project, although the sound was very sweet. In my late 20s I went to America again to have a few months of serious tuition and practice again with Richard. At the end of my time there Richard said; “you need a better instrument, I’ll fix up mine and you can borrow that.” And he was as good as his word. He needed to alter the pegbox (he had it set up with an easy tune system he was developing so he needed to re bush the peg holes) which he did in the States and brought it with him to Australia the next time he visited. So, I had this viola for the rest of my professional life; signed, sealed and delivered in his will. Such an incredible and generous gesture not just from him (who did not play any more) but Charmian Gadd his wife also (who did!)”

“And then, for a significant birthday (after I’d been playing it for 30 years) Dene and Nikolai, looking goofy, gave me a wrapped up oblong present which was obviously an instrument case. Knowing me, I couldn’t just say thank you but said something like ‘what do I need a new case for?’ When I opened the case Dene said it was the first time he had seen me absolutely gobsmacked and lost for words. I had only recently been wondering privately how long a ‘professional life’ could last. The knowledge that it was mine was so absolutely wonderful I still don’t have the words to describe it.”

“Everything I played of any consequence I played on this viola. The Australian Chamber Orchestra, Australia Ensemble UNSW and Goldner String Quartet. I toured all over the world with all these groups, many recordings, solos with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* with Dene... and Arthur Benjamin’s *Romantic Fantasy* and Richard Mills’ *Duo Concerto* conducted by the composer.”

Irina’s Smith viola is a 16 ½ inch Brescian model, not too big to be unwieldy and definitely not too small.

After playing it for so many years she has an intimate knowledge and relationship with the instrument.

“This viola makes me feel very close to Richard. I know it will happen eventually but I cannot imagine it not being in my life. I need it to go to someone who will love it as much as I do. It likes to annoy me with the odd wolf note on changing octaves of Fs but apart from that I love it because it always seems to give me as much as I need – I only have to ask it. It has its own unique sound. I’ll leave it to others to describe it but I have no need for any other instrument. I had the chance 20 years ago to have a superior Italian instrument which might have blended with the quartet in a better way but I just couldn’t do it - it wasn’t me. In any case, the GSQ just might sound more special with this Australian beauty.”

“It is interesting too, (for no particular reason) that both of us are only the second owners of these beautiful instruments. It will be very interesting how we will pass these on. Together or apart?”

A new stepping stone in Yvette's path

Sonia Maddock, Head of Cultural Networks & Communities

"Is that something Yvette could do?" My immediate response to Paul Goodchild's question back in 2010 was "absolutely", when he curiously enquired about our part-time role of Operations Assistant in the Music Performance Unit. Like most, I knew Yvette to be a top-shelf viola player, having been part of the Sydney Symphony for 11 years and a frequent guest artists with the Australia Ensemble UNSW. Yvette was also a regular face in the orchestra with the Collegium Musicum Choir, so was very much a familiar face to us all. The move to music operations seemed an unusual one for such an accomplished musician, but the role turned out to be the beginning of an amazing broadening of skills and change of Yvette's life which has been a wonderful asset to us all.

The recent impact of the pandemic on universities has been well-documented, as was the announcement of anticipated job losses at UNSW. Yvette is taking this opportunity of a changing environment to step out of her role with the MPU, which in turn provides an opportunity for us to briefly reflect on her contribution and celebrate her varied career.



We recently released to our subscribers the video of a concert back in 2011, including the premiere of Barry Conyngham's *Showboat Kalang*, in which Yvette performed in place of Irina Morozova who was on leave (pictured right). As one might imagine, performing at this level takes a lot of preparation, dedication, and time. While not rehearsing and performing, Yvette was busy in the office, managing guest artist contracts, running the box office, dealing with members of the choir and orchestra, and making sure all of the details of concert making were attended to. When she first arrived in the MPU, Yvette didn't know that photocopiers could magically sort into booklets or how to mail merge a letter to a giant list of recipients, but she quickly adapted, and learned an enormous range of new skills. The qualities which have enabled her to succeed in these roles are far less easily learned - Yvette is generous and always keen to help; she is responsive and empathetic; she is determined, humble, she listens, and has a fantastic and at-the-ready laugh. Some of you have come to know Yvette quite well over the years, and may miss that very personal interaction which she recognises as really important to keeping the organisation going. When all the world seemed to be going online, Yvette was always the champion of those for whom technology might be too great a challenge, and sought other ways to look after them.

Yvette has been a wonderful colleague to all those who have worked with the MPU over the past twelve years including our many guest artists, and a mentor to many young artswomen who have moved through our workplace. We all wish her well as she moves on to new adventures, and shares her generous spirit with other people fortunate enough to cross her path.

