

AE News

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble UNSW

Upcoming Events

Australia Ensemble UNSW Subscription Concert 3

Saturday May 21 at 8pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Cycles

BEETHOVEN | Trio Op.87 for flute,
clarinet & bassoon
GREENBAUM | Easter Island
GLANVILLE-HICKS | Concertino da
Camera
BRAHMS | Piano Quartet no.3 in C
minor Op.60

Performance includes a 15 minute
interval. There will be no bar service
available during the break.

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

with guest artists Lisa Osmialowski,
flute; and Andrew Barnes, bassoon

Staying Safe at our Concerts

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

Within the venue, always take your
allocated seat.

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

music.unsw.edu.au

Light versus Dark

Eleasha Mah

Stuart Greenbaum is a prolific
composer in a wide range
of genres with a large back
catalogue of chamber music
works including the Australia
Ensemble UNSW's 2008
commission of *Easter Island*. We
caught up with Stuart Greenbaum
about his work *Easter Island*, how
his relationship with his music
has changed over time, and what
he is up to in 2022.

**Can you tell us about the early
days of this commission and
what inspired you to compose
Easter Island? *Easter Island***
was commissioned by the
Australia Ensemble for their 2008
season. I've always found the
giant stone heads imposing and
monumental. But reading about
the rise and fall of that society
likely due to deforestation
really drew me into the story
as a metaphor for the planet
generally. And subsequently I
wanted to create music that had
contrasting light and darkness;
foreboding but also consoling.

**How do you approach writing
a work like *Easter Island*?
And were there any particular
challenges writing this work for
the Australia Ensemble UNSW?**

The writing process starts with
the history and trying to get
inside of what life on *Easter
Island* might have been like to
live on three centuries back
as it perhaps dawned on the
inhabitants that all was not going



Composer Stuart Greenbaum
Photo: Pia Johnson

well. What might that feel like?
What do you do? And from that
stand point one can then imagine
fragments of sound, harmony
and colour that resonate with
that. And once you have living,
breathing musical material, you
can start to order and develop
it into a narrative that hopefully
pulls the listener into this other
world. And alongside that, also
trying to write for flute, clarinet,
piano and string quartet in a way
that is engaging and rewarding
for the seven performers. That
septet has excellent balance
and variety already so it was a
pleasure to write for. Though, I did
write for bass clarinet (instead
of a standard clarinet) precisely
to enhance the foreboding
darkness of the stone heads
silently facing inwards.

What listening tips can you share with the audience members in the lead up to the concert?

Maybe it's most useful for audience members to listen in for the alternating moods: light versus dark, major versus minor, high against low and such. All those dualities are in play throughout the structure of the work and the engine behind the narrative.

Has your relationship changed with this work over time? How do you now feel about *Easter Island* 14 years on?

I plan to come up to Sydney for the performance in May and I'd ideally answer that question after hearing it live again. It was also performed in Melbourne in 2009 and in Akron (USA) in 2016, so I guess this is the 4th performance (that I know about) and lovely for it to return to the place and people of its premiere. As to the work itself, in retrospect I see it as an important work in my development as a composer. I've always written harmonically grounded music with clear pulse; but from around 2006/2007 I think I was increasingly seeking atmosphere – to be able to sustain a mood across longer journeys. And I think writing *Easter Island* helped me to find that in my writing process and what I personally most deeply seek as a listener.

As a composer what is it like handing over a new work to an ensemble? I can imagine in some ways, these ensembles act as temporary custodians of your work, as they share and realise your music for audiences.

Handing over the music is easy – exciting even. But first rehearsals typically unearth issues that are unexpected and require discussion, collaboration and a preparedness to try out alternatives to make a work resonate and sing. And that process often requires both composer and performers to go to the well – to dig deep. And that requires a leap of faith and good will – not to mention deep concentration and reserves of energy. But maybe all great music making requires that. No doubt we're working together with the aim of trying to create great listening experiences. Something that might transport an audience.

Further reading on Stuart Greenbaum's *Easter Island* can be found at:
stuartgreenbaum.com/downloads/index.html

2022 sees the premieres of *Brought to Light - Symphony No.5* commissioned by Cantori New York and *The Night that the Museum Burned* commissioned by Sydney Philharmonia Choirs. Are you able to tell us about these premieres? And perhaps what else you are working on and what we can look forward to hearing in the future?

Brought to Light is an hour-long 6-movement choral symphony that premieres in New York on 14 and 15 May (a week before the performance of *Easter Island*). It was written across 2020/2021 in lockdown. Ross Baglin's text takes the modern engineering of train tunnels as a metaphor for our descent into the underworld and our emergence back to the surface. It eerily mirrors what the world has gone through over the last two years, though the text was unfolding before the pandemic outbreak. It also, curiously, shares the duality of darkness and light with *Easter Island*. And the text for *The Night that the Museum Burned* is also written by Baglin; a shorter work it also features contrasts – here the opulent luxury of a high-rise penthouse suite function while the museum is burning below at ground level. That premieres in Sydney and July and I hope to be there for that too!

I am currently in the final stages of mastering a new album of my clarinet music (*A Trillion Miles of Darkness*) with none other than Australia Ensemble's own David Griffiths. Progressing that project through lockdown was challenging, but we're both thrilled to get to this point with it sounding so good and hope to be able to share that very soon.

David Griffiths, clarinet is collaborating with Stuart Greenbaum on his new album Trillion Miles of Darkness
Photo: Keith Saunders



And The Winner Is....

Eleasha Mah

No doubt composer Angus Davison is very pleased he picked up the phone when UNSW's Head of Culture, Sonia Maddock called on the afternoon of April 29. Maddock said he sounded shocked and ecstatic by the news he had unanimously taken out top spot in the Australia Ensemble UNSW's 2022-23 Layton Emerging Composer Fellowship.

Delivering such news to the winning composer is always a deeply wonderful moment for the Music Performance Unit team. The hard part is then asking them to keep it under wraps for a few more days when most are bursting to share their news with friends and family! This often occurs with important announcements. Embargo periods can stretch out for weeks or sometimes months. On this occasion, Davison didn't have long to wait – only five days while the administration team quickly played catch up, preparing press releases and planning the public announcement which took place on Wednesday May 4.

The selection panel said Davison's submission was "both technically accomplished and creative. There was a very consistent sense of musical voice across the works". They said "Davison demonstrated a significant capacity to compose for mixed ensembles and his string writing was of a high standard. The compositions were clever, polished and had a great sense of colour and shape."

Artistic Chair of the Australia Ensemble UNSW Paul Stanhope said "we look forward to Angus's forthcoming compositions as part of the fellowship."

Davison responded "It's a great honour to be selected as the Layton Emerging Composing Fellow for 2022-23! Programs that support young artists both creatively and financially over an extended period of time are few and far between, so I'm extremely grateful that Australia Ensemble UNSW, with the generous backing of Roger and Merrilyn Layton, have seen fit to support me and my work. I'm thrilled to be working with such phenomenal musicians and mentors, and I can't wait to get started!"

Davison has previously been selected for composer development programs with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Australian Composer's School, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's Cybec



Angus Davison is the 2022-23 Layton Fellowship winner

Program, the Ensemble Offspring Hatched Academy, and the Omega Ensemble CoLab Program, and he has been commissioned by Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras among many others.

He is an educator and arts administrator based in Sydney, and tutors classes at Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Now in its fifth year at UNSW, the objective of the Layton Fellowship is to foster greater engagement in and recognition of composition and chamber music activities at UNSW. This year the Music Performance Unit received over 50 applications.

Our sincere thanks to the generosity and vision of the late Emeritus Professor Roger Layton AM and Merrilyn Layton who's support has been integral to the facilitation of this Fellowship opportunity for emerging Australian composers.

Alumni Stories: Where are they now?



*Pictured left to right:
Maia Andrews, Stephanie Dillon and Jeffrey Milgate*

We adore having the opportunity to celebrate home-grown talent and with many Music Performance alumni going on to have successful careers around the world as artists in their own right, as such we regularly seek opportunities to collaborate with, and to showcase our people on UNSW stages.

In April, we were delighted to invite back to campus three alumni from the UNSW choral program to sing with the Collegium Musicum Choir as soloists, performing Mozart's Mass in C major K257 'Credo' and Schubert's Mass in G major D167.

Maia Andrews, soprano was in Collegium Musicum Choir and Burgundian Consort from 2008-2011 while completing a combined Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice).

Stephanie Dillon, mezzo soprano was in Collegium Musicum Choir and Burgundian Consort from 2011 - 2015 while completing a combined Bachelor of Arts (Media)/Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice). **Jeffrey Milgate**, tenor was in Collegium Musicum Choir and Burgundian Consort from 2008-2011 while completing a Bachelor of Music (Music Education).

Maia recently returned to Australia after many years singing in Europe. Stephanie is now a Principal Artist at the Song Company and appears frequently with the Bach Akademie Australia. Jeffrey has appeared in concert in Japan, France, Italy and Brazil. It was very special to have these singers back on UNSW soil at Sir John Clancy Auditorium, and a fantastic opportunity for current students to see where music can take them after UNSW.

Turning the Page

This month, the Music Performance Unit farewells Alex Siegers who has been the Music Engagement Assistant since 2019. Over the past three years, Alex has built up our social media and digital presence and supported the organisation of rehearsals and concerts of the Large Instrumental Ensemble Program. You may have met Alex at one of our concerts, perhaps in the Box Office, seen her on stage as Stage Manager or spoken to her when booking your subscription. Alex's last concert with Music Performance UNSW will be the May Australia Ensemble UNSW subscription concert - so do say farewell and good luck if you are lucky enough to bump into her in the foyer!



Alex is off to complete her honours in Jazz Performance and has accepted a part time role at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Library. Being a jack of all trades, Alex will continue to sing with the Choir of St James' Church and present on 2MBS Fine Music Sydney, so look out for her there! We would like to take this opportunity to thank Alex for her contribution to our unit's activities and to wish Alex the very best in her next chapter. Good luck Alex!

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