

AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

August Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour concert

Tuesday August 15, 2017

1.10 - 2.00pm

Leighton Hall, Scientia Building

Schubert: *Quartettsatz*

Bohm: Variations on a theme of

Schubert

Kats-Chernin: Variation on

Trauerwaltz

Munro: *Schubertiades*

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Subscription Concert 4, 2017

Saturday August 19, 2017 at 8pm

Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Schubert's Octet

Roussel: *Divertissement*

Dring: Trio for flute, oboe & piano

Grandison: *Riffraction*

Schubert: *Octet*

7pm: Composer Conversation

with Mark Grandison and

Paul Stanhope in the UNSW

Chancellery Council Chamber,

adjacent to Clancy Auditorium.

Free, all welcome

www.music.unsw.edu.au

Composer in the classroom

DEBBIE ZHOU

Aside from being an accomplished composer, winner of the inaugural Blakeman National Composition Prize **Mark Grandison** is also a highly regarded high school teacher, and has been Director of Music at Kambala since 1994. Former Kambala Music Prefect and current third year Bachelor of Law/Arts & Business student of UNSW **Debbie Zhou** reflected on Mark Grandison's role as educator and inspiration, as the Australia Ensemble takes on his prize-winning work, *Riffraction* in its August subscription concert.

Mark Grandison's life is and always has been about the music. It has been three years since I undertook music under Mark's tutelage, but his ambitiousness has not waned. This time when I catch up with him, his focus is not only on the upcoming performance of his prize-winning composition



Riffraction, but he juggles it alongside months of rehearsals of musical directing the first-ever school production of the musical *Wicked* – a challenging work that is only made more demanding by producing it in a school environment. "It's a musical pantomime," Grandison states before finally catching a breath to discuss how he caught the musical bug.

The pursuit of Mark Grandison's compositions and pathway into music education were all accidental, his first encounters with classical music coming from Bugs Bunny cartoons – "it came all the wrong way round for me", Mark explained with a laugh. But the result of hard work allowed him to catch up during his university studies, and he was quickly absorbed by the sphere of composing that gave him the opportunity to create his "own little world". This universe soon expanded into music

education, a “passion to share what you know with others”, he told me, and to share the “sense of liberation and freedom that [composing] provides to operate within a world of our own making”.

When I started at Kambala, Mark, otherwise known as ‘Mr. G’ was a vaguely familiar name – even if he hadn’t taught you directly. Mark was one of those teacher-figures loved by musical and non-musical students - they would rave about his eccentric, rigorous approach to teaching, or the amusing and occasionally outrageous humour he would bring to a room. He was a floating presence around bands, string orchestras and choirs, but truly emerged as a leading figure in Music Festivals (the annual school concert and inter-house choir competition held at the Sydney Opera House), and the conductor of the Orchestra – where at times, his own compositions, ranging from atonal, dissonant pieces to more lyrical, soft lullabies, resonated throughout the school hall. Each year, there was almost an expectation that the newsletter would publicise the latest Year 12 music achievement in the HSC; whether it came from performance, composition or theory, there was no denying that over the 20 years Mark has been at Kambala, he augmented the music culture within the school immensely.

But teaching and composing went hand-in-hand for Mark. He emphasised how his teaching style readily translates into the way he approaches his own compositions: “I could...break down that process by wrenching the music from its abstract and complex process. By doing it the hard way, it gave me the advantage of being a good teacher. I knew what my students were going through.”

Mark’s own vigour to stretch his students’ creative capabilities saw him sitting with students and workshopping their own compositions...and the secret? “Flexibility and responsiveness...as well as pre-emptiveness”, he says. His meticulous style saw the norm become compositional redrafting occurring over 20 times – but the ideas that it sparked, and the improvement it saw to both my classmates and my own composition was a testament to Mark’s unwavering demeanour. “As a composer, you learn to be very self-critical and simply not accept what is in front of you. I tell my students to do the same thing,” he remarked.

For Mark, music has never been an ornament – it’s a way of life. “You are not just teaching a subject, you are teaching an approach to life. The biggest buzz I get from classes is when they have really been turned on by a piece of music. Occasionally after analysing a piece of music...a class will spontaneously, sometimes, break out into applause. When that happens, it is very memorable. And [I] think – mission accomplished.”



Inaugural Blakeman National Composition Prize winner Mark Grandison received his award from Professor Andrew Schultz in 2016. An element of the prize was to have the winning work performed in the Australia Ensemble’s 2017 subscription season.

Composer Mark Grandison will be part of a Composer Conversation with Artistic Chair Paul Stanhope on Saturday August 19 at 7pm the Council Chamber of the UNSW Chancellery - free entry, all are welcome.



Paul Stanhope, Artistic Chair, will host the Composer Conversation

Mark’s work Riffraction will be performed in the subscription concert on Saturday August 19 at 8pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW.

Schubert's Octet - Behind the Behemoth

MIREI BALLINGER

It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.

- Ursula K. Le Guin, The Left Hand of Darkness

As human beings, we attach meaning to the full spectrum of experiences in our lives. That being the case, Schubert's octet has always appeared to my ears like a saga told in musical form, with undulations in both the journey and the thoughts that accompany it, not dissimilar from long distance running or hiking.

Why is it that we are so attracted to the journey? What is it about the hero's journey that captivates us enough to join them in mind, soul or body? Why is it that so many people undertake the arduous process of transformation across time and space? (I give the term 'arduous' its full weight, as more often than not, there plays out a distinct battle both internally and externally.)

Is it for the thrill of overcoming our struggles? Is it because we seek the process of catharsis that overcomes our senses and transports us away from the visceral world? As Sarah Wilson describes in an article on hiking, it lulls the mind and brings us to the present moment. "My mind chatter goes crazy at first – inventing, debating, scheduling – then it

settles, slowly. It's like my mind is rocked to sleep by the motion. After about 40 minutes it settles into a thoughtless, wordless space... Oh, sweet nothing!" "I run in a void," Haruki Murakami writes, in a passage from his memoir on running. "Or maybe I should put it the other way: I run in order to acquire a void."

Schubert's Octet, at the very least, is an expansive work. An hour long musical marathon, it is an exploration of our nebulous perception of time and the space that it occupies. Like a runner training for a marathon, Schubert is an expert in setting the pace; each section of the course is differentiated in its own characteristics, adjusting to the musical terrain, the modulations indicative of the highs and the lows, the ease and the flow. One can almost imagine the bounding enthusiasm at the start of a trail giving way to respite, only then to work up to the huffing and puffing of an uphill climb. (This may, however, be an indication of the author's activities as she listened to the octet during her most recent gym session.)

A study on the psychological process of long distance runners indicated three main areas of focus; pace setting, discomfort, and environment. This conclusion, as unsurprising as it is – of course a runner is going to think about the course, setting the right pace, and the distance they have covered – is an indication that at least a third of a runner's internal monologue was in fact about how absolutely miserable they were.

Which begs the question; then why do it? Borrowing another running term, they will inevitably talk about 'running through it'. In its more modest connotation, the phrase simply means to keep going. But the grander meaning is that 'through it' means 'past it'. That is the runner's great article of faith: that a better mood will supplant a worse one, pain will ease, joy will kick in. Perhaps this is what we seek in the Octet; a metamorphosis of our perception and a cathartic release, only then to be transported back to our seats once more, forever changed.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time

- T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets



Portrait of Franz Schubert by Wilhelm August Rieder

Music of different flavours

The end of each academic semester summons a flurry of performances as the various community ensembles master their repertoire. Consequently, May is a busy time for the Music Performance Unit, which produces concerts of the UNSW Wind Symphony, UNSW Orchestra and Collegium Musicum Choir.



On Friday May 26, Cameron Burgess (left) performed the Krommer Clarinet Concerto with the UNSW Orchestra conducted by Steven Hillinger, in a program including Glinka, Brahms and Bizet's *Carmen Suite no.1*. In the second half of the concert, the UNSW Wind Symphony conducted by Dr Steven Capaldo presented a mixed program of American works, including Mackey's *Lightning Field* and Cichy's *Colours*.



The following Sunday, May 28, the Collegium Musicum Choir directed by Sonia Maddock, and Collegium Musicum Orchestra including the four string players of the Australia Ensemble, presented *Coronation Anthems* of Handel, and Mozart's ever-loved *Requiem*.



During the winter break, Director of Music, Art and Culture Sonia Maddock got busy working with secondary school students attending the Indigenous Winter School through UNSW's Nura Gili centre in a singing and body percussion workshop, and a similar program with the entire 85-strong staff of UNSW Early Years for their professional development day.



Top to bottom: Cameron Burgess (clarinet) and UNSW Orchestra; double basses, UNSW Orchestra; Collegium Musicum Choir and Orchestra; soloists with the Collegium Musicum: Andrew O'Connor (bass), Richard Butler (tenor), Sonia Maddock (Choral director), Sarah Ampil (soprano) and Nyssa Milligan (mezzo)

Leading into semester 2, members of the Burgundian Consort convened on Friday July 21 for their annual workshop day, spending time on repertoire and choral coaching, and a session with composer Matthew Orlovich, working on his new work *Sonnet, to the Comet of 1825*, which won the inaugural Willgoss Choral Composition Prize and will be performed in recital on September 20 at 7.30pm.



Top to bottom: UNSW Wind Symphony; Wind Symphony members and director Dr Steven Capaldo; Students of the Indigenous Winter School, Nura Gili; staff of UNSW Early Years at the end of their professional development music session; Burgundian Consort with Willgoss Choral Composition Prize winner Matthew Orlovich (front row, right)