Issue 2, 2016: April

AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Never Stand Still | Music Performance Unit

April Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Free lunch hour concert
Tuesday April 12, 2016
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Piazzolla: *Cafe 1930* from *Histoire du Tango*
Borodin: *Nocturne* from String Quartet no.2
Ginastera: *Impresiones de la Puna*
Borodin: *Cello sonata*

Free flute masterclass
Thursday April 14, 2016
1.10 - 2.00pm
Leighton Hall, Scientia Building
Geoffrey Colllins (flute) works with young flautists of UNSW
Free, all welcome

Australia Ensemble @UNSW
Subscription Concert 2, 2016
Saturday April 16, 2016
8.00pm
Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Dreams and Prayers
Haydn: String quartet Op.50 no.5 in F 'Ein Traum' (A Dream)
Golijov: *K'vakarat* from *Dreams and Prayers of Isaacs the Blind*
Villa-Lobos: *Quatuor*
Kerry: *while the music lasts* (first performance)
Shostakovich: Piano Trio no.2 in E minor Op.67

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Symbolism beyond words

music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts.

T S Eliot *The Four Quartets*

It sounds idyllic. A home on a hill in Country Victoria. Composing in the morning, writing in the afternoon. Perhaps an hour or so attempting some tricky piano repertoire and a good long hike with the dog. Except that when I call Gordon Kerry there's a pesky crop sprayer buzzing to and fro across the sky and the snakes are out in force, enjoying the blistering tail end of summer. So no dog walk today, and a break from tinkering with the sounds in his head, while he talks about his new work for the Australia Ensemble, co-commissioned by Patricia Brown and dedicated to the Ensemble's founder, Roger Covell.

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First things first. Do you have a routine for composing?

I start with a blank sheet of paper and a pencil. There are two complementary things I do. One is to draft out the architecture of the piece, in the sense of proportions, its constituent sections and their overall character. At the same time I'm working on the shorter ideas which might turn into motives or themes or chord progressions or rhythmic ideas. I then produce a sketch which is pretty much unintelligeable to anyone other than me – more an aide memoire – and then I type straight into the Sibelius music processing software.

Composer Gordon Kerry, whose new work while the music lasts *will be first performed on April 16*

What about this piece? What is its genesis? You've written about how your starting point is three lines of verse, from TS Eliot's Four Quartets, which you remember Roger using to demonstrate the lively acoustic in the Barrel Hall at Huntington. You've also talked about how this work is deliberately abstract, without the programmatic prop of words or a traditional harmonic structure.

Yes. I used to feel that there was a problem that contemporary composers had to face, that of form and structure. No two classical sonata designs are the same, but there is a lingua franca behind it. People would have known in general terms what to expect. Whereas now you have to somehow captivate an audience over a period of time in such a way that there's the drama, the tension, the release, but without the

crutch of a program or the classical grammar of diatonic harmony. What's going to happen, where, to make the audience feel like they've reached a point of arrival?

You do have one programmatic element in the work: the introduction of each instrument reflecting the historical make-up of the Ensemble.

Yes. The ensemble has been growing ever so slightly since it was founded and I introduce the instruments in order of how the present members joined. [Co-founder] Murray Khouri was a clarinettist so I start with a clarinet solo, then viola, first violin and so on.

The ensemble grew from sextet to a septet, with the addition of an extra violin. Does that change things for the composer?

It's interesting having the extra violin. It gives a little bit more body to the texture. The sextet was inclined to be a bit treble-y. Writing for the septet dispensed with a number of those issues. For example, I didn't feel the need, as I had in the Sonata da camera, which I wrote in 1992 to use bass clarinet and alto flute. I thought for my own discipline I'd stick with just the C flute and Bb clarinet. Just what's there.

You've had a long association with the ensemble. Did your knowledge of the characters involved – and their style of playing – inform your writing?

Yes. I first heard them when I was visiting Sydney from Melbourne, and then I lived in Sydney and had various dealings with them in my role as arts administrator and composer. They have been a constant and important part of my musical life.

I have a good sense of the individuals' sounds, and knowing its core repertoire has naturally influenced the way I've written.

Finally, you and Roger are both renowned for not just creating music, but writing about it. You and he (and Peter McCallum) even shared the music criticism load at the Sydney Morning Herald for a few years. Were you tempted, in this work, to acknowledge that somehow, by using words?

It's true that a text presents the composer with a narrative and that in some ways solves the problem of form... But that memory of Roger quoting T S Eliot was just so typically Roger. The symbolism of music in the Eliot is all about what is beyond words, so writing a piece of abstract music was a way of embracing it.

Dr Patricia Brown and Prof Roger Covell

In his program note, Kerry quotes more lines from Eliot's Four Quartets:

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness…

With that in mind, I leave Gordon to his hilltop, his words and his music.

Harriet Cunningham

Gordon Kerry's new work* while the music lasts *will receive its first performance on Saturday April 16, 2016 in the subscription concert* Dreams and Prayers*, at 8pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW. It was commissioned by Dr Patricia Brown and is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Creating an instrumental voice

Bending pitch as if stretching heavy elastic, and the weight of pulse that makes you move in spite of yourself. There are some styles of music which, upon first hearing, give an immediate and strong attachment to a particular cultural group. Klezmer music falls into this category being instantly recognisable as part of European Jewish heritage, often despite limited audience understanding of those characteristics which make it unique. Klezmer was traditionally a celebratory style, an instrumental form originating in Eastern Europe for joyful Jewish celebrations such as weddings and holiday celebrations, which has since merged into musical forms globally.

The style of klezmer is immediately recognisable, with techniques imitating vocal sounds such as crying, wailing and laughing. However, being an aural folk tradition passed on through generations by ear (rather than transcription), it evolved over time to incorporate other folk styles as well as jazz elements, to the extent that regional subgenres emerged across Europe. *Klezmorim* (performers of this style at celebrations) were accomplished instrumentalists who

learned through listening and playing, but the lack of notated music has made the progress of klezmer music difficult to track. Emigration played an immense role in the dissemination of klezmer to both North and South America, where the advent of recording technologies and access to live performance venues prompted a twentieth century revival of the tradition, and assimilation into other musical forms including chamber music. It is acknowledged, for example, that Shostakovich integrated klezmer melodies and techniques into his G minor Piano Quintet, 8th string quartet, and his Piano Trio no.2 in E minor Op.67, which concludes the Australia Ensemble's subscription concert on April 16.

The portability of instruments was a factor in the development of the klezmer sound, so violin, clarinet and accordion were favoured over larger and less transportable instruments. The techniques possible on string instruments and clarinets (such as the bending of pitch, sliding, and tonal variety) are some of the fundamental elements which capture what is chiefly recognised as a klezmer sound. The music itself tended to be in a flexible form to follow the activity level of dancers, and a lack of strict rhythmic adherence created a lilting quality.

Being a style primarily for celebration, it is unsurprising that at the heart of klezmer are dance tunes. The expressive melodic lines were originally based on cantorial melodies of the synagogue, and then developed into dance melodies ranging from very fast to slow tempi, depending on the needs of the occasion. The most popular of these are the *freylekhs* (Yiddish for 'festive'), circle dances often in a particular melodic mode (*Ahava Rabboh*) giving the harmonic colouring which most would identify with Jewish and klezmer music, a scale (Phrygian dominant scale) also common in Indian, Flamenco and Middle Eastern music forms. It is the additional idiomatic techniques of klezmer which provide the unique quality differing from these other traditions, particularly the instrumental imitation of vocal sounds.

Beyond *freylekhs*, there is an abundance of diverse dance forms including Argentinian tangos. The composer Osvaldo Golijov was born in Argentina in 1960, growing up with classical chamber music, Jewish liturgical music and klezmer music, in an Eastern European Jewish household. After studying locally, he moved to Israel then to the US, all for further study and immersion in diverse musical traditions, which carried into his composition. His work since has been extensive and varied, including collaborative projects with both the St Lawrence String Quartet, and the Kronos Quartet. With the Kronos Quartet and clarinettist David Krakauer, he worked on his klezmer-infused clarinet quintet *Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, of which *K'vakarat* is the third movement. Clarinettist David Krakauer has been internationally praised for his work in 'modern klezmer', a performer who has thoroughly explored and transformed the music of his Eastern European Jewish heritage into a contemporary and vital form. He is a leading clarinettist based in New York, with whom the Australia Ensemble's associate artist David Griffiths had the opportunity to undertake study. Krakauer's influence on David Griffiths was considerable, primarily as an elite performer but also as an exponent of klezmer traditions.

French Canadian clarinettist Michèle Gingras (Miami University) also refers to Krakauer's expertise, and gives the advice for clarinettists to listen to the experts before taking on playing Klezmer music. Much of the colour of klezmer comes from idiomatic ornamentation, rhythmic accompaniment figures and, on clarinet, *krekhtsn* ('moans') which are sounds imitating the break in the voice common in Eastern European synagogue chant. Gingras points out that, since klezmer was learned by imitation, there is no standard notation for music – her recommendation is to get hold of some vintage recordings, and get dancing!

Sonia Maddock

David Griffiths and the string players of the Australia Ensemble will perform Osvaldo Golijov's* K'vakarat *from* Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind *in the Australia Ensemble subscription concert on Saturday April 16 at 8pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium UNSW.

A beginner's guide to listening to klezmer

Things you might notice include:

- idiomatic ornamentation and bending of pitch to mimic the characteristics of the voice, including crying, wailing, laughing and moaning;
- melodies based on synagogue chant using characteristic scales and modes;
- mostly celebratory dance forms;
- originally portable instruments, such as violins, clarinets and accordions.

Top to bottom: Clarinettist and klezmer expert David Krakauer; Composer Osvaldo Golijov; Australia Ensemble Associate Artist and former student of Krakauer, David Griffiths

Wearing a three-cornered hat with style

Geoffrey Collins has been a member of the Australia Ensemble since 1983, after making guest appearances since 1980. He talks to Greg Keane about his work in the Ensemble and his other two musical 'hats' as teacher and Principal Flute with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

Why has the Australia Ensemble survived so long?
"I think one of the reasons the Australia Ensemble has endured so successfully is the eclecticism of our programs: we try to calibrate them to include challenging new pieces which are likely nonetheless to resonate with audiences - Sir James MacMillan's Raising Sparks and Thea Musgrave's Narcissus are recent examples - rarely heard works in a familiar idiom and an old favourite.

Another blessing has been the light touch of the UNSW administration. We are part of the Vice-Chancellor's remit. We've been extremely lucky in that Vice-Chancellors have always been supportive and non-interventionist."

Leading edge repertoire holds few fears for Geoffrey as he has been involved with it since his teens.
"I was fortunate to be a member of *Teletopa*, an electro-acoustic improvisation group, utilising contact microphones to amplify all sound sources, from traditional instruments such as violin, saxophone and flute, to various percussive devices, sheets of tin, glass and masonite, metal and plastic materials, vacuum cleaner and shortwave radio.

"In 1972 we toured Great Britain and Japan and I was fortunate to meet the gods of the then avant garde such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Toru Takemitsu (at a very formal Japanese restaurant), Steve Reich and Luciano Berio."

Before that, his experiences with avant garde music had not been as positive.
"I originally trained as a pianist and during one performance at the Sydney Conservatorium, the Deputy Director strode onto the platform and locked the keyboard in mid-performance because of suspected "abuse of a musical instrument." It just sounded that way because the playing was amplified. In fact, no harm was done.

"I was blessed by my teachers at the Sydney Conservatorium, Nancy Salas (piano) and Victor McMahon, James Pellerite and Margaret Crawford (flute) and as the result of a Churchill Fellowship, William Bennett, Michael Debost and Peter Lukas-Graf in Britain and Europe.

"It was pedagogic in the best sense and in the great overarching 400 year old tradition. I suppose my own teaching is more 'practical' in emphasising contemporary realities of globalisation. One of the first things you learn as a woodwind player is the scarcity of spectacular repertoire, although I suppose James Galway changed that to an extent.

"Another issue is the difference between solo, chamber and orchestral playing styles and expression. All players love playing chamber music as it's inherently collaborative and collegial – with no one on a podium telling you what to do!"

Australia Ensemble flautist Geoffrey Collins
[photo: Keith Saunders]

Which brings us to the third musical hat: the position of Principal Flute with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.
"It's a great time to be a player in the Adelaide Symphony. We've just appointed a new Chief Conductor, Nicholas Carter. He's dynamic and charismatic and only the third Australian Chief Conductor of an Australian Symphony Orchestra after Sir Charles Mackerras and Stuart Challender at the Sydney Symphony.

"Nick's appointment is a bold move. Arvo Volmer was great. The orchestra universally liked and admired him. However, I think orchestras regularly need a frisson of creative tension which can only be achieved by a change at the helm.

"I think one of the most unfortunate notions in orchestras today is to regard conductors as either superstars or 'builders'. There's no reason why a 'builder' can't be exciting. The only thing we now need is a dedicated hall!"

Any thoughts about the current state of classical music?
"I hate the increasing trivialization of serious music and wonder whether the 21st century will produce a Pierre Boulez."

Geoffrey Collins performs in the Australia Ensemble April 12 lunchtime and April 16 subscription concerts, and will present a flute masterclass with young flautists on Thursday April 14 at 1.10pm in Leighton Hall, Scientia.

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