

AE NEWS

newsletter of the Australia Ensemble @UNSW

October Events

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Free lunch hour concert

Tuesday October 10, 2017

1.10 - 2.00pm

Leighton Hall, Scientia Building

Cui: *Five Pieces* Op. 56

Sculthorpe: *Dream Tracks*

Beethoven: String Quartet no. 11

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Percussion masterclass

Thursday October 12, 2017

1.10 - 2.00pm

Leighton Hall, Scientia Building

Leading percussionists Joshua Hill and Mark Robinson work with UNSW students Alice Hu and Tom Waller in a free public masterclass

Australia Ensemble @UNSW

Subscription Concert 6, 2017

Saturday October 14, 2017, 8pm

Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Postcards

Sculthorpe: *Tabuh Tabuhan*

Bloch: *Paysages*

Del Aguila: *Salon Buenos Aires*

Tchaikovsky: *Souvenir de Florence*

Collegium Musicum Choir

Sunday October 22, 2017, 5pm

Sir John Clancy Auditorium

Sounds of England

Rutter: *Musica Dei donum & Cantate Domino*

Vaughan Williams: Mass in G minor

Rutter: *Requiem*, with chamber ensemble

www.music.unsw.edu.au

Tunes and shadows – Sculthorpe in Bali

GRAEME SKINNER



On its first tour abroad to London in September 1965, the Sydney Symphony gave the premiere of Peter Sculthorpe's orchestral score *Sun Music I*. Roger Covell's program note for this performance memorably characterised it as "*sun music written by a composer living in a country where the sun can be as much enemy as friend; and, since light is often most clearly defined by darkness, it contains the aural equivalent of shadows as well as a representation of dazzling brightness*".

Early in 1966, Sculthorpe arrived in the United States to take up a fellowship at Yale, already planning to compose several more *Sun musics*. And a work for strings that he composed in the American summer, drawing on sun imagery from Mexico's ancient Aztec cultures, ultimately became *Sun Music IV*.

But he remembered this as a time of 'stylistic crisis', unsure 'about the direction I was taking with my *Sun Music* style'. The Melbourne

poet, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, also then at Yale, wrote a poem for him that was 'admonitory'. 'Two Ways of Summer' addressed the danger of sameness in his *Sun Music* idiom ('Full glare of noon / And withering of colour / ... / And clamouring / Dry and mean'), and the dilemma of choosing a new path ('A meeting of the roads, / I am torn both ways / At the one time').

His choice was between the 'ferociously austere' path of the recent pieces, and a new fascination with the music of the Indonesian island of Bali. Another friend recalled how 'deep into that' Peter was at the time. In mid year the Yale press posthumously released composer Colin McPhee's long-awaited book *Music in Bali*, the first study by a Westerner of the composition and performance of Balinese gamelan. On the morning of its release, Peter waited on the doorstep of Eero Saarinen's striking Yale Co-op for the bookshop to open, before taking his purchase back to his college rooms and playing the music examples at the piano 'over and over'. He later referred to it as the book that 'changed my life', and hoped that McPhee 'would point me in a new direction with my music'.

Using it 'as a textbook', his first exercises were straightforward arrangements of McPhee's music examples. He played one of these on the piano for fellow-composer Ned Rorem in September, music he later incorporated into *Sun Music 3*. Originating in tuned-percussion quartets (*gender wayang*) used in Balinese shadow-puppet plays (*wayang kulit*), it was a free reworking of a piece called *Pemungkah*, by Lotring, a well-known Balinese composer in the 1930s and 1940s. Woodwinds featured prominently in his finished arrangements, which he described to his publisher as 'all madly Balinese *gamelan*, radiant and, well, I think they're quite beautiful very happy music'.

Over the winter, spent as an artist-in-residence at the Yaddo in upper NY state, he contemplated the dawn in his work of this 'Asian sun': 'Often I'd look

out the window and dream of a place like Bali, and endless warm paradise'.

But the real Bali was no paradisiacal. Only a year earlier, violence between president Sukarno's forces and mainly Islamic Suharto supporters resulted in some of the worst massacres of the Indonesian civil war. Unaware of Washington's complicity in supporting Suharto, Peter later regretted being so 'divorced from' reality, and not at the time more 'concerned with Bali or Balinese culture ... just thinking: Isn't this fantastic? ... a wonderful music that I can use in some way to offset the weight of hundreds of years of European tradition'.

McPhee's book provided Sculthorpe, then, with an 'imaginary geography', an exotic sound world of static perfection, and a foil to the 'developmental' Western influences he was attempting to move away from. He had long been interested in ostinato as a technique,



Peter Sculthorpe [photo: Bridget Elliot]

but McPhee's examples suggested new and varied refinements of this type of rhythmic organisation. They also suggested a way of reintroducing traditional diatonic harmony into his musical language without sacrificing his by now characteristic rhythmic and melodic style.

The first two important outlets for his Balinese ideas and musical borrowings were the orchestral *Sun Music III*, and *Tabuh Tabuhan*, for wind quintet and percussion, commissioned for the 1968 Adelaide Festival. Though some of its Balinese-influenced materials were sketched while he was still in the United States, most of the work on the piece seems

to have been done back home in Woollahra, in an intense burst close to, and (as was so typical of Peter) after the deadline. The players did not have all the music until less than a fortnight before the performance.

Peter described the new work as being 'full of tunes!' Yet, despite his up-beat optimism, some shadows also crept into the score. And it was a few of these darker moments - wistful, nocturnal, even magical in mood - that he refashioned, many years later, and in response to a sad new reality, into a short piece he called *Music for Bali*, a memorial for those killed and maimed in the Bali terrorist attack on 12 October 2002.

Dr Graeme Skinner (University of Sydney) is author of the biography *Peter Sculthorpe: the making of an Australian composer* (UNSW Press ebook, 2015)

Peter Sculthorpe's Tabuh Tabuhan will be performed in the Australia Ensemble's final subscription concert of 2017 on Saturday October 14 at 8pm in the Sir John Clancy Auditorium, with Geoffrey Collins (flute), David Griffiths (clarinet) and Ian Munro (piano) joined by guest artists Huw Jones (oboe), Andrew Barnes (bassoon), Robert Johnson (horn), and percussionists Joshua Hill (below left) and Mark Robinson (below right).



Percussionists Joshua Hill and Mark Robinson will also work with young UNSW percussionists Alice Hu and Tom Waller in a free public masterclass on Thursday October 12 at 1.10pm in Leighton Hall - free, all welcome.

Geoffrey joins the choir



Back in March 2016, Geoffrey Collins sent through a link to a piece by Rutter scored for flute and choir, thinking that it was both very appealing and eminently suitable for UNSW's Burgundian Consort. This instigated some repertoire research and planning which culminated in the Collegium Musicum Choir's October 22 program involving the Burgundian Consort.

Following on from its September evening recital, the Burgundian Consort will return to Clancy Auditorium to perform Rutter's lively *Cantate Domino*, and *Musica Dei donum* with flautist Geoffrey Collins, a celebration of music itself with lyricism and a delicately composed solo flute line. The Collegium Musicum Choir and organist Kurt Ison take on Vaughan Williams' challenging and rich *Mass in*

G minor for eight-part chorus and soloists, before Geoffrey Collins returns to the stage with guest artists including Alexandre Oguey (oboe), Paul Stender (cello), Tim Paillas and Tim Brigden (percussion), and Genevieve Lang (harp) for Rutter's celebrated *Requiem* in its chamber ensemble version. It is proving to be a sublime opportunity to enjoy the flute as a prime instrumental colour set against luscious choral writing.

Sounds of England - Sunday October 22, 2017 at 5pm in Sir John Clancy Auditorium
Burgundian Consort - RUTTER | *Cantate Domino* and *Musica Dei donum* with Geoffrey Collins (flute)
Collegium Musicum Choir - VAUGHAN WILLIAMS | *Mass in G minor* and RUTTER | *Requiem*
www.music.unsw.edu.au/choral
Subscribers eligible for a 15% discount on pre-booked tickets. p 02 9385 4874

Flavours of Buenos Aires

LUKE IREDALE

When one thinks of chamber music, inevitably it is the Western Music canon that comes to mind. The great string quartets of Beethoven, the piano quintets of Schumann and Brahms, the piano trios of Haydn. But like all great art, music comes from many places and in many flavours, and there is much joy to be discovered by investigating just a little further afield.

Buenos Aires is one of the most culturally diverse cities in Latin America. With a large immigrant population and a rich history of culture, literature and music, the city is a melange of sights and sounds as colourful as the artworks which line its streets.

There is a vibrant art music tradition in Argentina, especially notable being the music of Alberto Ginastera, who in the twentieth century broke new ground in interpreting the rhythms and boundless energy of Argentine folk music with a distinctively modernist hand.

Best-known of all is the legendary baritone Carlos Gardel (AKA 'The King of Tango'), who was the most influential voice in what would become Argentina's most important musical invention – the tango. Developed on the banks of the Rio de la Plata and popularised by musicians such as Gardel and accordion virtuoso Astor Piazzolla, the lurching rhythms of the Tango defined the vivacious musical spirit of Buenos Aires.

At this October's subscription concert, get ready to leave your seat and dive headlong into the irresistible atmosphere of Latin America, as all these sounds and more are to be found in Miguel del Aguila's vibrant nostalgia trip *Salón Buenos Aires*. The Grammy-nominated composer was born in Uruguay in 1957 and trained in the United States and Vienna, so it's no surprise that his music is coloured with a remarkably cosmopolitan brush. The sound of his native South America is at the heart of everything, pulsing away like a primal heartbeat underneath the clean, melodic edges of traditional Western form.

Of course, no city is truly paradise, and Buenos Aires has had its fair share of civil unrest, particularly during the 1970s when the city was all but held hostage by militaristic in-fighting between the right-wing Argentine Anticommunist Alliance and left-wing revolutionary groups like *Ejército Revolucionario*



Miguel Del Aguila
[photo: Donna Granata]



del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army). It all blew up in 1974 into a period of state terrorism which lasted almost a decade, during which up to 30,000 left-leaning dissidents were "disappeared" by the Argentine Military Government.

But it's the period prior to all this trouble that del Aguila lovingly evokes in *Salón Buenos Aires*. Not the socially and politically unravelling Argentina of the 1970s, but the halcyon days of the composer's youth, of 'great prosperity and optimism', as del Aguila writes in his introduction to the work. It's a sunny afternoon strolling the streets, the sound of music bubbling up from packed clubs, carried on a warm breeze.

Scored for flute, clarinet, violin, viola, cello and piano, del Aguila sets three different South American dance forms over the course of three movements. The first is a laid-back *samba*, in which the string players are instructed to sing along with their parts. The second movement is a tango, at turns dark, tranquil and passionate, a unique mixture of Piazzolla and Schumann. *Obsessed Milonga* closes out the set, a *milonga* being an early form of the tango from del Aguila's native Uruguay. It's the most forceful of the movements, with an air of 'tension and angst', the composer writes, running underneath the effervescence as the milonga rhythm is obsessively teased out.

For listeners wanting to discover more about the music of South America, del Aguila is a fine place to start. He manages to situate the traditional sounds of his homeland within an appealing, recognisable chamber music form - no easy task! Enjoy *Salón Buenos Aires* at the AE's 'Postcards' concert on October 14 and be whisked away to the world of 1950s Argentina.