

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Dorottya Fabian and John Napier, eds. *Diversity in Australia's Music: Themes Past, Present, and for the Future***

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

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**Reviewed by Julja Szuster**

The tradition of celebrating significant birthdays of senior scholars, teachers or practitioners with the publication of a Festschrift seems to have waned in recent years. This is unfortunate because these books are invariably fine collections of essays written by colleagues, friends and younger scholars and provide an opportunity not only to acknowledge the influence of the one being celebrated but also to publish new research that will likely be of interest to the said senior celebrity. The volume under review is a Festschrift to commemorate Roger Covell's 85th birthday. The focus of the celebrations in 2016 was a symposium in his honour at the University of New South Wales, where Covell famously taught for thirty years from 1966 until 1996. Three of the papers delivered at the symposium—those by Dorottya Fabian, John Napier and Janice Stockigt—have been expanded and are included in this book. But the initiative from Fabian and Napier, Covell's colleagues at the University of New South Wales, to edit a volume of essays honouring Covell's contribution to music in Australia resulted in a nation-wide call for papers. The result is a substantial volume covering a wide range of relevant topics. In addition to an introductory chapter, there are fourteen individual essays: seven on new research of the history of music in Australia, three on recent developments in new-music practice, two on multicultural music and dance, and one each on contemporary Indigenous music and film music.

Covell is perhaps best known for the publication in 1967 of his history of music in Australia, aptly titled *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967). It was the

first attempt by an individual to gather together, in one 356-page volume, what was then known about the history of music making in Australia, from settlement until the mid 1960s, and the investigations then current of the music of Indigenous Australians. He speculated on what possibilities lay ahead for the nation's broad range of music, given the country's multicultural population, and he saw Indigenous music and western Australian music influencing each other more in the future. While nothing like this volume had been attempted before, and little had been done since 1967, a second edition was published by Melbourne University's Lyrebird Press in 2016, nearly half a century later. The new volume includes a postscript by Covell in which he updates some of the key issues raised in the original text and even acknowledges his mistake in not including Peggy Glanville-Hicks in the pantheon of Australian composers in the 1960s. One of the positive features of the new edition is the extension by Suzanne Robinson of Covell's original bibliography, which provides an up-to-date list of the research literature on Australia's music.

*Diversity in Australia's Music* opens with a short biography of Covell followed by a list of his awards, honours and publications. This list includes a broad range of scholarly writing, musical editions, reports and several original libretti for works with Peter Sculthorpe. The editors Napier and Fabian have written an introductory chapter entitled 'Musical Practice in Australia: Reflections on the Past and Present.' Their purpose is to complement Covell's 1967 book by updating readers on developments of scholarship and practice in Australian music. Their extensive list of organisations and selected individuals that have contributed to the growth of Australian art music in the past fifty years is an important contribution, and their comments on specific topics covered by the writers in the collection are insightful. Regrettably, there are no chapters offered, as the authors acknowledge, on the development of Australian jazz or popular music: there have been considerable developments in those areas of practice in the last fifty years.

The chapters by Campbell, Roennfeldt, English, Symons, Stockigt, Hope and Trainer, Fabian, Kouvaras and Napier are, as we have come to expect from these authors, well written, thoroughly researched and incisive, and the material covered fills important gaps. And the writings are a pleasure to read.

Turning now to the individual contributions, Peter Campbell has written the first comprehensive history of music in Canberra in a chapter entitled 'The Politics of Music in a New Society: Musical and Social Development in Canberra's First 100 Years.' This study of music making in Canberra from the days of early settlement to the present—a period of more than a century—describes the advantages and disadvantages of being the nation's capital to the cultural development of the city. The periods of expansion and contraction of both amateur and professional music making during the growth of the city were buffeted by the sporadic funding from different government sources. The author's sharp observation is that, unlike other Australian cities, Canberra's cultural development, rather than being allowed to evolve naturally, was shaped artificially like the city itself. He points to the fragility of music in Canberra as being evidenced by the withdrawal of support for it, in 2012, by the Canberra School of Music after some forty-seven years.

Peter Roennfeldt's 'Concert Music in Early Brisbane' documents the wide range of art music performances in the city of Brisbane from its establishment in the 1860s as the capital city of the state of Queensland to the 1930s: a period of considerable population growth. An

important observation in this long-overdue study is that, although there is evidence of much musical activity in Brisbane in the period under investigation, the city's cultural life developed independently of that of the other capital cities south of the border. Of particular interest is the work of Robert Dalley-Scarlett in the 1930s, whose scholarship informed his performances of major choral works of Bach and Handel with chamber-sized ensembles, well before such performance practice became widely accepted elsewhere.

The chapter by Helen English is a welcome contribution to the small number of studies of music in Australia's regional centres and an addition to her own research into the history of music making in the Hunter region of New South Wales. Entitled 'Migrant Musicians and the Impact on the Emerging Music Making of the Hunter Valley, 1840–1880,' her essay documents an investigation of the musicians from the British Isles who worked in the two very different regional centres of Maitland and Newcastle in the mid-nineteenth century. The pastoral Maitland community was quite homogeneous and had aspirations of gentility, whereas the diverse, essentially working-class citizens of Newcastle engaged mainly in community music. English's close examination of these two very distinct cultures and the musicians who worked in them underpins her perceptive judgement that they played a valuable role in the formative days of community building.

David Symons's 'Towards an Australian National Opera? Developments during the Later Post-Colonial Period 1930–1960' documents the emergence of newly written operas on Australian social and cultural themes by composers Clive Douglas, James Penberthy, Margaret Sutherland, John Antill and John Gordon. Symons wrote this chapter because of his belief that since the 1960s, when modernism took a firm hold in Australian music, the repertoire of the period 1901 to 1960 has been largely ignored. His case is persuasive, and this chapter goes a long way in rectifying that neglect.

Janice Stockigt has written a very personal and engaging essay on the Czech oboist Jiří Tancibudek, her teacher, who encouraged her to become acquainted with Czech music. The story that she tells in 'Jiří Tancibudek (1921–2004): An Oboist Extraordinaire' is based on a 2000 interview with Tancibudek and is supplemented by archival research. Tancibudek's story begins with his and his wife Vera's flight from communist-controlled Czechoslovakia in 1948 to their settlement in Australia and the contribution he made as a performer and teacher: in Sydney, then Melbourne and finally Adelaide. While this chapter will be a revelation, even to many of those who knew this fine musician, we can only hope that this will lead to a full account of Tancibudek's life and influence. It is, however, a perceptive tribute to one Australian's finest post-World War II émigré musicians.

Cat Hope and Adam Trainer document the key role played in the past three decades by Tura New Music, founded and led by Tos Mahoney, in the promotion and support of new music in Western Australia. Their chapter 'Tura—Thirty Years of Building New Music Practice in Western Australia' details not only the success of the organisation in building audiences for experimental art music in Perth and regional Western Australia but also, importantly, the influence of composition teachers John Exton and Roger Smalley in the dynamic music department at the University of Western Australia. These achievements, the authors argue convincingly, are all the more commendable given the state's isolation and separation from the new music communities elsewhere.

Dorottya Fabian has provided an overview of the activities of Covell's University of New South Wales chamber opera company during the nearly three decades of its existence from 1968 to 1997. The company specialised in productions of operas by Benjamin Britten, unknown Baroque operas, rare performances of works by Australian composers—including some commissions—and lesser known works by familiar opera composers. Fabian's chapter is aptly titled 'Making the Obscure Familiar: Roger Covell's Contribution to Opera in Sydney,' for it could be said that his project has been emulated in recent years by a number of small chamber opera companies that are producing adventurous productions of contemporary Australian operas, early Baroque and Classical fare. Fabian, using Covell's private archives, has constructed a comprehensive list of all the University of New South Wales opera productions.

Another very engaging essay is Linda Kouvaras's discussion on recent compositions that incorporate extramusical audio or video material, with—in the case of two works by Robert Davidson—a cappella chorus. In her chapter entitled '(Post?-) Feminism, "New Topicality" and the "New Empathy": Australian Composers Working with the Concrete,' she discusses one Davidson work in which a recording of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech is played over reactions from a chorus of singers. There are two other works discussed in the essay: another by Davidson and one by Samantha Wolf. These recent compositions focus on topical feminist issues, and Kouvaras argues that, when dealing with such sensitive matters, it is essential that compassionate responses are elicited from the listener; for that, empathy for the plight of the victim is a necessary requirement. For Kouvaras, these composers are engaging more broadly with the nation's place in the world, which is one of the themes identified by Covell in 1967.

The stories of three South-Asian-born exponents of Indian classical dance, who have taken their practice into very different artistic directions, are the subject of John Napier's 'The Company You Keep: Three South Asian Dance Companies in Contemporary Australia.' Napier uses these examples to explore the notion of Australian multiculturalism being founded on principals of liberalism, rather than policy, where citizens have rights to cultural freedom and self-determination. By these examples Napier engages in a useful discussion on the nature of Australian multiculturalism from the perspective of contemporary dance practice that has traditional roots but has moved away from them.

There are three chapters by early career researchers covering some worthwhile ground. Johnny Milner's 'Hearing Nostalgia and Landscape in Australian Cinema and Australia' is an examination of the role soundtracks play in Australian films when feelings of nostalgia are called for, with particular reference to the 2008 film *Australia*. Samantha Dieckmann's 'Constructing Whiteness in Blacktown: Everyday Encounters with Diversity in Australia's Music' is based on her doctoral ethnographic music study on white Australians participating in music of other ethnicities in one of the most multicultural communities in the western suburbs of Sydney and how they come to define their Whiteness in that environment. Julie Rickwood's 'Revitalising Desert Gospel Choral Music' has its genesis in her doctoral field work in Central Australia: an investigation of the renewal and revitalisation of desert gospel choral music. Her chapter also tells the story of the more recent fame, through the documentary *The Song Keepers*, of the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir (CAAWC) who perform a wide range of music including Lutheran hymns in their own Arrernte language. It is disappointing that

this is the only essay on Indigenous music, given the amount of research and developments in music practice in the past fifty years.

Readers with an interest in the communication required in collaborative composition may be interested in the chapter, written by Vincent Giles, Elizabeth Welsh and Graeme Jennings, on the artistic collaboration required when using period instruments in contemporary compositions. The chapter is entitled 'Australian Composition for Baroque Instruments: Exploring the Importance of Composer-Performer Collaborative Relationships in Twenty-first-century Composition.' Another essay of interest is Cor Fuhler's 'Splinter at Mungo: The Art of Communication,' which presents the reflections of some members of the Splinter Orchestra's recording project at the ancient Lake Mungo site.

This Festschrift is an essential supplement to Covell's second edition and a must for any respectable Australian music library and researchers in the field. It is heartening that the collection contains substantial pieces of scholarship on a broad range of topics. And, given the calibre of many of the contributors, a significant number of the essays expand and enrich the ongoing narrative of Australia's music.

#### **About the Author**

Julja Szuster is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, where her research is focussed on seventeenth-century Italian music and on cultural life in colonial Australia.