

## **The Future of Classical Music in Australia**

### **What is happening to music education in schools?**

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### **The Context**

The long-term vibrancy of the classical music sector in Australia has been periodically threatened and subsequently the focus of ongoing research studies in recent years. Areas of special interest include the financial viability of giving large government grants to orchestras, opera and ballet companies, many of which are experiencing diminishing audiences. Another important area of research has been the cost of identification and training of the elite musician to perform in these companies.

### **Research**

Undertaken at roughly the same time in the mid 1990s, three reviews presented a broad set of challenges to the Australian Government in supporting musical activities throughout Australia. These reviews, commissioned by the Hon Dr. Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education Science and Training released in 2005, included the 'Strong' Orchestra Review, the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) and the Review of the Australian National Academy of Music and the Australian Youth Orchestra. What was significant about the Orchestral Report was the overturning of the recommendations from the report to close two state orchestras. Both States saw their orchestra as an important resource to the communities they served and passionately supported their continued funding. In addition, the decision of the Government to close ANAM was also reversed as a result of pressure from the community. Regrettably, most of the recommendations from the NRSME are still to be implemented.

Findings from the NRSME present enormous challenges for the future of the identification and training of the potential musician, and future audiences for our classical music sector. The fact that most children are missing out on a quality music educational experiences, and that there is a lack of individual or specialist instrumental teaching in most schools, has far reaching consequences for the development and training of our future classical musicians. This remains essentially the domain of the private studio teacher, and indeed the Australian Music Examinations Board who continue to play a pivotal role in developing a syllabus which takes students through the different classical periods.

### **Classical music training in schools**

On the other hand, excellent music training is available in some of the elite private schools in each state. In Victoria there are also a smaller number of State secondary level 'specialist' music schools that provide classroom, instrumental and vocal programs. These schools cater for the various stages of musical development of their students and offer instrumental training in all the orchestral and band instruments along with vocal training. They also run a range of ensembles from beginner to advanced levels including a Symphony Orchestra. The problem is that these schools can be counted on two hands.

In Victorian government secondary schools, the provision of instrumental tuition is

only made possible by the Regional provision of instrumental and vocal teachers to schools. The role of the regional instrumental program is critical in the provision of teachers at no additional cost to the school and considered a highly valuable resource. It enables schools to provide instruction to students without charge who would otherwise be excluded from access to a music education due to financial disadvantage. It also enables schools to provide ensembles and choirs.

#### Schools with specialist music programs

A very small number of these schools offer and core and elective classes to VCE level and prepare students for entry into tertiary music schools. To offer the full range of orchestral instruments, these schools also contribute money from the global budget and engage in serious fund-raising to pay for teachers of specialist areas such as double reed and French horn.

It is regrettable that due to the limitations of the Regional provision, specialist programs cannot be offered in most secondary schools in Victoria. It is also regrettable that there is no such provision of instrumental programs in primary schools apart from 'user pays' arrangements. Sadly, a rising number of secondary schools, that previously had strong band programs, and now becoming 'rock schools'.

Special mention must be made of the 'Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School', which is the leading provider of specialist music and dance programs in the state. Along with the 'elite' private schools and a handful of secondary schools, these schools are the essential school providers of classical music programs in the state.

More recent research has been conducted by the Music Council of Australia in compiling a number of SWOT analyses that have been published on the Music Council Knowledge Base. Topics include Classical Music, Chamber Music, Choral Music, New Music, Opera, and Tertiary Music Education. In line with overseas trends, research findings would generally place the future of classical music in Australia as at risk of further decline. On the other hand, popular music is mostly flourishing.

Without a strong base of schools that offer classical music training, including an expansive classroom music core and elective programs supported by a high quality specialist instrumental training, the risk of further decline will be augmented.

### **There is an urgent need for a proactive approach to the preservation of our culture of classical music in schools.**

I offer the following thoughts.

#### **EDUCATION**

In response to the NRSME, The Victorian Workshop (2007) aimed to come up with actionable responses to three of the important issues raised in the National Review.

- ❖ Teacher education, training and teacher professional development.
- ❖ Curriculum (policy and content focus)
- ❖ Curriculum (provision and implementation)

The core recommendation presented from the Workshop related to the need for a relevant, sequential and continuous curriculum that meets student's needs, and forms the basis for any extension of access to music learning.

A sample of the Recommendations concerned:

*Teacher quality and training*

- ❖ a requirement of generalists primary teachers to demonstrate their music skills and capabilities prior to teacher registration
- ❖ the revising or extension of pre-service training (acknowledging the need for teachers to be more highly skilled in music);
- ❖ develop conversion courses to assist in increasing specialist music teacher numbers

*Provision and policy*

- ❖ creating more time within the curriculum for Music Education
- ❖ the need to extend the provision of instrumental music programs throughout the primary years
- ❖ access to specialist teachers for ensemble and instrumental or choral activities
- ❖ finding ways for funding music professionals
- ❖ improving music education support services
- ❖ partnership development between schools and community arts groups
- ❖ Increasing the Regional provision of instrumental music teachers to schools.

**National Curriculum development**

- ❖ The need to write continuous, developmental, and sequential curriculum that requires schools to allocate adequate time on the timetable
- ❖ The presentation of core recommendations which includes the study of music and musical works in a range of styles and genres that includes classical music

*What schools can do to support Classical Music*

***Sample of pro-active actions and events offered in my school to encourage an interest in classical music and the development of high-level performing skills***

- ❖ The hosting and organization (in conjunction with the Region) of a State-wide Double-Reed Spectacular and the engagement of a double-reed and French horn teacher funded by the school
- ❖ The hosting and organization (in conjunction with the Region) of 'Singfest', a two day singing camp for students in the Region.
- ❖ Partnerships with the Victorian Opera Company with students providing the orchestra for their youth production and doing work experience
- ❖ Partnership with the Victorian Music Teachers Association in hosting instrumental teacher training events, and a conference at the end of the year
- ❖ The hosting of the Association of Music Educators (AMUSE) Conference
- ❖ The engagement of a number of 'Masters' to present masterclasses in piano, saxophone, double reed
- ❖ The engagement of a top professional conductor to work with the symphony orchestra
- ❖ The organization of a choral conducting workshop for new music teachers in the school
- ❖ The organization of conducting workshops for students in preparation for the House Music Festival

- ❖ Hosting a visiting overseas orchestra
- ❖ The development of composers in the school by the formation of a composers orchestra, a performance of a new student composition at every concert, and participation in various composition competitions, and a 'Composer in Residence'
- ❖ The commissioning of works by local composers for the orchestra and choirs and performances of works by Australian Composers
- ❖ Taking students to performances of Victorian Opera and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
- ❖ Presenting the production of a school 'Opera' each year and a concerto concert with the symphony orchestra.
- ❖ Creating ensembles which cater for 700+ students with some ensembles performing works from the professional repertoire. These include chamber music ensembles
- ❖ A whole school singing program (1,350 students)

***The important contribution of outreach music education providers***

Significant providers of outreach music education include the education sectors of Australian orchestras and Opera companies, Musica-viva, and The Song Room. For school age children, the State Music Camps, and the ongoing programs such as the Melbourne Youth Music have exemplary orchestras and bands and provide opportunities for students who do not attend schools with classical music programs. The cutting of funds to the MYM over the last few years in that the numbers of students taking part in MYM programs was reduced, is detrimental to the future of classical music in Victoria.

The need to develop an educational model that is aware of the specific context of classical music education and training throughout Australia is well overdue.