

*Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District* by Shostakovich... if the composer happens to hit on a simple and understandable melody, he, as if frightened by such a calamity, flees into the jungle of musical confusion, at times reaching complete cacophony. – Pravda, Moscow, January 28, 1936.

All that jazz...



A long time ago, when I was a college boy, the most sought after duty was sheep watch. The chosen few would collect a hamper from the kitchen, grab the keys to a 4WD, and head out to where the ewes were lambing, to protect them from dogs. We would light a fire, tune our radio to the ABC, and listen to their late night jazz program, which I remember went on into the early hours.

To me jazz is best in the wee small hours, and the name I remember most from those times is Graeme Bell. He was regarded as the Father of Australian jazz, and is credited with heading the revival of trad jazz in Europe in the 1940s - *Downbeat* magazine said "Bell's is unquestionably the greatest jazz band outside America". Bell founded the Swaggie record label - mostly for jazz - and toured for the ABC.

In the 60s the Graeme Bell All Stars played regularly at the Chevron Hotel in Kings Cross, Sydney's premier night spot of the era, which also hosted Sinatra and Bassey and other stars on their visits to Sydney.

At about the same time I was front row centre when Louis Armstrong gave a concert in Wellington (NZ), and I've never encountered another performer who had the incredible charisma of Satchmo – I don't remember anyone

else being in the hall, he sang and played and waved his big white hanky just for me. That's why I've included the photo of Graeme Bell and Louis Armstrong – two jazz greats.

In 1997 Graeme Bell was inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame, and in 2003 the Australian Jazz Bell Awards were established as a tribute to his legacy. He died on June 13 this year, aged 97.

You might gather from all this that I'm a jazz fan, and you'd be right. So I'm really pleased that our next concert will feature local jazz man Terence Koo.

We'll speak more of Terence and the program in our next issue - meanwhile, put the date in your diary now: 2pm Sunday October 14 in the Great Hall.

## Shades of Grey

In the May issue I mentioned *Spem in alium*, by Thomas Tallis. Now sales of the work are booming, thanks to a more recent publication, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a best selling erotic trilogy, where it receives an honourable mention.

Peter Philips is the founder of The Tallis Scholars - he says "I haven't read *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but I am most grateful to the author for introducing so many new listeners to the musical sensation that is Thomas Tallis's *Spem in alium*. Written during the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth it features 40 individual voices singing in Latin that combine to a thrilling climax for the words '*respice humilitatem nostram*' (be mindful of our humiliation)."

Author E L James has issued a recommended soundtrack list to enhance the enjoyment of her readers, which includes works by Bach, Delibes, Villa-Lobos, Chopin, Verdi, Vaughan Williams, Canteloube and Mozart.

That might give you something to talk about.

## Melbourne Intervarsity Choral Festival



Intervarsity Choral Festivals are quite an experience. This year the group performed the Berlioz *Requiem* in Melbourne Town Hall.

Due to its scale, this work is not often performed – this, I believe, was the first time it has been heard in Melbourne for thirty years. In addition to a full orchestra, large chorus and tenor soloist, the *Requiem* calls for four brass bands and extra percussion – our performance included eight pairs of tympani and two very large bass drums.

The premiere performance in Paris in 1837 totalled 400 musicians. We had a choir of 172 and an orchestra of 89, plus 16 brass not shown above - they were in the balcony.

For those who fear for the future of such works, it is worth noting that the average age of all performers was under 30 - many of the Melbourne Youth Orchestra are still at school.

In the *Tuba mirum* the basses compete with the percussion, the brass bands and the full orchestra playing at full volume – which really is awe-inspiring, just as Berlioz intended. We marked our



scores appropriately, and I'm proud to say, we were heard.

Of this piece, Grove says "the forces employed are of enormous magnitude: an immense number of bowed instruments, the woodwind doubled, tripled, quadrupled, a tempest of rolling drums and clashing cymbals; and, at each corner of the stage, a blare of brazen instruments which carry, as from the four winds of heaven, their ringing,

shattering trumpet-calls. Well might Heine say that such music reminded him of primeval monsters and fabulous empires... it suggests human sacrifices and blood curdling rituals, grips emotion by the throat and leaves it gasping for breath. For pure savage force and strength, unsurpassed, and amid these terrors passages of a strange, inhuman beauty."

Berlioz said that, "*The number [of performers] indicated is only relative. If space permits, the chorus may be doubled or tripled, and the orchestra be proportionally increased. But in the event of an exceptionally large chorus, say 700 to 800 voices, the entire chorus should only be used for the Dies Irae, the Tuba Mirum, and the Lacrymosa, the rest of the movements being restricted to 400 voices.*"

"I understand," said the King of Prussia to the composer, "that you are the composer who writes for five hundred musicians."

"Your majesty has been misinformed," replied Berlioz. "I sometimes write for four hundred and fifty."

This is a wonderful choral work, if you get the opportunity don't miss it. Having sung it, I now have an ambition to sing the *Te Deum*, which is said to be even bigger.

The Intervarsity Choral Festival is one of Australia's oldest cultural institutions – at 63 years it's older than Opera Australia, for example. Newcastle University hosted the first half of the 2008 Sydney Intervarsity, when we presented a concert in the Great Hall, featuring Australian compositions from Percy Granger to Elena Kats Chernin.

University choirs play an important role in ensuring musical opportunities for people of all ages, and inspiring the careers of many young musicians. Like the University of Newcastle Chamber Choir, seen here enjoying the fruits of their labours in Bermuda.



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