

"Out of the cacophony of random suffering and chaos that can mark human life, the life artist sees or creates a symphony of meaning and order." - Desmond Tutu



Miriam was accompanied by Christopher Allan. Now you know what a proud father looks like.

Our Evening with Miriam Allan

From her very first note, we knew that this would be a special occasion, when Miriam Allan sang and spoke at a concert to support our choir. Miriam is in Australia to appear in Pinchgut Opera's *Giasone*, and we were privileged that she took this time to be with us.

Lacking musical training, I don't have the words to express the excitement of this evening, but the critics do. Here's a condensed and edited version of how critics around the world describe Miriam Allan:

"Allan's voice is lovely, crisp and clear, with a brilliant upper register - an agile, supple instrument, projected effortlessly, arrow-like into the concert hall, with a clear and ringing higher register but with an emotional depth and warmth that reaches across to the audience. Her presence onstage is magnetic. It is an exquisite voice, enchanting."

The evening was hosted by 1233's Paul Bevan, who, being personally acquainted with Miriam and a talented musician himself,

encouraged her to share her experiences on the way to becoming a regular on the world stage.

Special moments? Miriam describing her initial trepidation and then excitement at performing a Bach cantata at the foot of his grave in the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. Watching her relive the moment as we listened to a recording of her as a student singing Gustav Holst's *Four Songs for Voice and Violin* with Vaughan Hughes in Christ Church Cathedral. Hearing an unreleased recording of her singing a Mozart aria, demonstrating the challenges this composer presents for singers.

Her rendition of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* – exquisite!

Introducing Miriam, Paul Bevan noted that Newcastle punches well above its weight in so many areas, football, athletics and the arts, and asked if growing up here made it easier for her. In answering, Miriam acknowledged the supportive environment of her student years – the opportunities she had to participate in orchestral and vocal music, how she was encouraged to learn to read music, to learn and perform in such rich environments as Christ Church Cathedral, surrounded and mentored by so many fine musicians.

I hope I'm correct in thinking that Miriam was saying thank you to Newcastle, and telling us that we have an environment in which talent can flourish. I don't for a moment think that anything could really stand between a talent such as hers and the world-wide recognition she so richly deserves, but such an environment helps nurture that talent, exactly when it needs nurturing.

There are many contributing factors – choirs, bands, orchestras, opera companies, venues like the Cathedral - and most importantly audiences. It is increasingly difficult to attract the audiences necessary for the survival of this environment – the arts need patronage.

In attending functions such as this evening, you are, in a practical way, providing such patronage. As anyone who was there knows, such small acts of patronage can and will be richly rewarded.

Take the time, make the effort, convince your friends to be part of this exciting scene. Go to a concert. Enjoy a night out with the arts. There are other Miriams out there who need your support.



A highlight of our Poulenc concert was Sally Walker playing *Sonata for Flute and Piano* with Gabriella Pusner on piano. Chris Allan says of Sally : "I've rarely heard a flautist with such a range of colours. She makes each phrase come alive with an imaginative colour and expressive nature."



with
Terence Koo Trio
2pm Sunday 15 December
The Great Hall
Tickets available now at
www.stickytickets.com.au/13810

Miriam Allan
appears in
Pinchgut Opera's
Giasone
December 5-9
Bookings
<http://pinchgutopera.com.au/box-office/>



Parental Guidance Recommended

Researchers at Cambridge University believe they know why it's difficult to attract audiences, especially younger people. They have identified three phases people go through as their musical tastes change, which they call intense, contemporary and sophisticated.

Teenagers want to establish their identity and independence, they prefer music which their parents find obnoxious – loud, discordant, distorted. Having established their independence, in the contemporary stage they tend to seek the acceptance of others, as they socialise in clubs and parties, and the music they prefer is more danceable, even uplifting.

This phase plateaus in early middle age, when tastes become more sophisticated, people develop a liking for jazz and classical music, demonstrating a more personal expression of intellect, status and emotional maturity.

Dr Jason Renfrow says "As we settle into ourselves and acquire more resources to express ourselves – career, home, family, car – music remains an extension of this. There are aspects of wanting to promote social status, intellect and wealth that play into the increased gravitation towards 'sophisticated' music.

"For many this life stage is frequently exhausted by work and family, and there is a requirement for relaxing, emotive music for those rare down times that reflects the other major 'life challenge' of this stage – that of nurturing a family and maintaining long-term relationships, perhaps the hardest of all."

Of course, younger people may see it differently!

Stephen Thompson writes: "It's funny, the way 'How do we get our kids to embrace our music instead of the stuff they like?' has a way of bleeding into 'How do we get our parents to embrace our music instead of the stuff they like?' Most of us seem to come wired with the sense that our generation knows best; that those who come before us are stuck in the past, while those who follow us need to be brought up to date on what *real* music sounds like...

"Speaking for myself, I've got a 70-year-old mother with whom I love to share music, and I've got 9- and 12-year-old kids with whom I love to share music. Looking in both generational directions, what those three people want the most from me – way more than music recommendations – is my time. (Thankfully, that happens to be exactly what I want from them.) Let shared discovery serve as an excuse to spend more time with your folks, and the new music they discover will be the least of the benefits."

Our last concert was a wonderful introduction for many to the music of Francis Poulenc. "Poulenc wrote music that popped like corks from Champagne, pieces dizzy with the sounds of Parisian music halls and jazz", writes producer Tom Huizenga.

Poulenc claimed not to like jazz, but he was certainly influenced by it, and the syncopations in his score for his ballet *Les Biches* in particular show a clear debt to jazz.

There will be something for everyone in our next concert. We'll be joined by the Terence Koo Trio to present music that combines the classics (kind of), jazz and the opportunity for the whole family to join in some traditional Christmas carols. More details in our next issue.

Cacophony is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com

For more about Newcastle University Choir, go to www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com