

"We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of dreams."

- Arthur O'Shaughnessy, *Poems of Arthur O'Shaughnessy*



In July 2006 the Universities of New England and Newcastle combined in a joint project – the first Australian National Seniors' Festival. Some 90 choristers rehearsed under the direction of Heather Buchanan to present a concert at the Newcastle Conservatorium.

Peter Sculthorpe was commissioned to compose a piece for the occasion – his *To Love* premiered at the concert. However, the work proved to be a little technically challenging for the seniors, and was performed by the Newcastle University Chamber Choir.

I met Peter Sculthorpe in the early 70s, and was delighted to have the opportunity of meeting with him again. To my surprise he obviously remembered our previous meeting more than

thirty years before and quite brief at the time. He was a gentleman, very accessible, with a child-like enthusiasm for his music, and he loved to share that enthusiasm with musicians and audiences.

He is a great loss to Australian music. More than any other Australian composer his music was evocative of the Australian landscape. He loved bird song, which he included in many of his compositions, sometimes to the discomfort of the performer. He used the didgeridoo, and many of his works were based on Aboriginal melodies.

Peter didn't write many pieces for choirs. *To Love* was only four minutes long, and was based on a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley, first published after his death in 1824:

*Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they thicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.*

It is an honour to have met and for a moment worked with such an inspiring person.

Vale Peter Sculthorpe (1929 – 2014.)

Our Christmas Concert

Our next concert is on Sunday December 7 in Christ Church Cathedral with the Christ Church Cathedral Choir. The concert will include pieces from J S Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, noted for its duet with two obbligato oboes d'amore.

The attribute *d'amore* was applied to a number of instruments of the Baroque era for their pleasing sound, for example the viola d'amore and the violin d'amore. Originally there was a *d'amore* version of every woodwind instrument.

After J S Bach's death the oboe d'amore fell into disuse and was almost forgotten. Many asserted that it was invented around 1720, but Bach

included extended passages in his early cantatas, and it is obvious that the instrument was common in the early 18th century, especially in northern Germany.

The mid 19th century saw a revival of Bach's works, but there was no suitable instrument to play the oboe d'amore parts, which were commonly given to the cor anglais.

However Bach aficionados were not satisfied, and began to revive the instruments Bach had used. In 1874 Victor-Charles Mahillon began to make oboes d'amore and a number of other original instruments. Now many oboe specialists make a few oboes d'amore, but there is a small demand and long waiting lists.



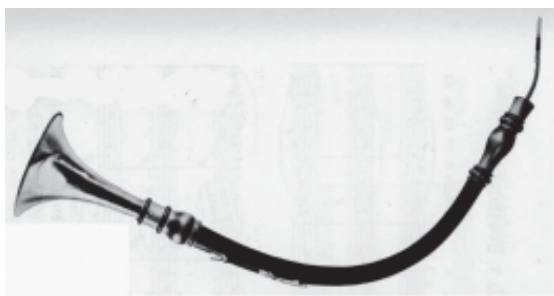
Bach's score for his Oratorio, showing the beginning of the duet for oboes d'amore.

It causes the artist the most difficulty - in 1802 Heinrich Christopher Koch wrote: "The reason why this instrument... has fallen into disuse is probably none other than that absolutely clean intonation is even more difficult to achieve than in the case of the normal oboe."

The oboe de cassia is said to be the predecessor to the cor anglais. It appears in many of Bach's works, including the St Matthew and St John Passions, the Christmas Oratorio and many cantatas. They are said to derive from hunting horns which had a bent form and a flared bell.

Gunther Joppig is an oboist and author who as a young man was a musician in the army. He sometimes suffered from headaches from playing on marches "which, as every young oboist knows, is in fact the most strenuous activity there is, apart from Handel's oratorios or the works of Bach.

When he reported to the sick bay, and told the doctor of his problems, the doctor turned to the orderly and said "Give this man a large supply of painkillers. Oboists all go mad in the end anyway."



An oboe de cassia

Many members of the choir have had the pleasure of performing in the Sydney Town Hall, accompanied by the grand organ. This instrument is now 124 years old, the first performance being on August 9, 1890.

Initial plans were for an instrument of 59 speaking stops at a cost of £5,000, but this was considered to be too modest for Sydney's new Centennial Hall. The British firm of William Hill and Sons won the open tender. Their offer

included a full length 64 foot pedal stop, a world first at the time. Construction began in London in 1886 and was completed in July 1889. Prominent organists invited to try it out rated it 'the finest organ ever built by an English organ builder' and 'a marvel of excellence in both tone and mechanism'.



Original drawings for the Sydney Town Hall organ

The organ was packed into 94 crates and arrived in Sydney on the *Gulf of Venice* just before the opening of the hall in November 1889.

Construction took seven months, and included some 9000 pipes with a gas engine to pump the bellows. This was replaced in 1906 with electric compressors.

Four thousand guests attended the grand opening, performed by W T Best.

The organ in Christ Church Cathedral is not quite so grand, but it is one of the finest in Australia. Peter Guy will accompany the choir in the *Bach Oratorio*.

An invitation

Come along to Christ Church Cathedral Newcastle on Sunday 5 October for a preview of Newcastle's finest choral acoustic in action. Peter Guy, Cathedral Organist and Choir Director, has extended an invitation to choral enthusiasts to hear the visiting Brisbane Chamber Choir sing at the 9.30am liturgy, and then perform a short concert at 11.15am. The Brisbane Chamber Choir, directed by Graeme Morton, are on a Southern Journey tour funded by the Australia Council, specialising in contemporary Australian choral music. You will hear Paul Stanhope's charming *Ubi Caritas*, Ross Edwards' stunning *Mass of the Dreaming*, and Nigel Butterly's *Exultate Deo*. The concert is free, although a donation following the event would be appreciated. Is there a better way to spend the Sunday morning on a long weekend than listening to this excellent choir?