

Armidale Symphony Orchestra - President's Report for 2008

I have much pleasure in presenting my report for the year ending 31 December 2008

During 2008 the Armidale Symphony Orchestra performed, as usual, three major concerts and participated in several other activities.

The first concert, in May, was conducted by Peter Maddox and comprised the colourful *Joyeuse Marche* by Emmanuel Chabrier; Peter's own *Blood and Carnations* song cycle based on *100 Love Sonnets* by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and sung beautifully by soprano Nadia Piave; and concluding with CV Stanford's *Irish Symphony*. The concert was deemed to be a great success artistically and was very well received by the audience, although the attendance was well down on expectations.

Graham Howard conducted the August concert, comprising the *English Folk Song Suite* by Vaughan-Williams, an *Irish Tune from County Derry* by Percy Grainger, a world premiere performance of a new double guitar concerto entitled *Spin Cycle* by Armidale's own Steve Thorneycroft with the composer and Steve Tafra as soloists, the *Symphony No. 5 (Reformation)*, by Mendelssohn, and finishing with the lively *Shepherd's Hey* also by Grainger. I especially congratulate Steve Thorneycroft on his inventive composition, which I believe we all found quite delightful.

The final concert for the year was another world premiere, this time of the oratorio *God's Drawing Board* with Music by Elena Kats-Chernin and words by Ralf Steadman. Bruce Menzies was the conductor and the driving force behind this production, which involved several other of Armidale's performing arts organisations.

Members of the ASO also made significant contributions to a number of other productions during the year. The Armidale Music Foundation's tenth choral weekend in March was, as usual, a great success with the performance of Gustav Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*. In May and June a core group from the ASO provided orchestral support for the ADMS production of *Titanic: the Musical*. Then as a consequence of the unavailability of the Sydney Town Hall, the annual Celebration Concert was moved to Armidale with the ASO providing the bulk of the orchestral support.

During 2008 NECOM conducted an appeal to purchase a new Kawai concert grand piano for the auditorium. The appeal took the form of a 'sale' of keys of the keyboard at prices ranging from \$2000 down to \$50 depending on their distance from middle C. After some deliberation the committee executive determined to contribute to this appeal by purchasing the key of middle C.

As your president I was then privileged to attend the launch of the new piano at a recital given by Konstantin Shamray, winner of the 2008 Sydney International Piano Competition. This was a truly stunning performance by a virtuoso performer on a wonderful instrument. I believe that the money was indeed well spent.

In my report last year I referred to the need for improved access to the OTC auditorium for large instruments and for people with disabilities. Progress on this issue has been slow and it appears that there is little likelihood of a lift being installed in the foreseeable future. An alternative proposal to use the old gymnasium directly beneath the auditorium as a rehearsal and storage space has some merit and is being actively pursued by NECOM.

Once more I have enjoyed the support of a very dedicated executive and I thank them for all their hard work.

Maurice Anker