

Armidale Symphony Orchestra President's Report - 2020

AGM 15th March 2021

2020 started off like many other years with the ASO's involvement in the annual AMF choral weekend. The repertoire for the workshop and performance was Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah: Danse bacchanale* and Saint-Saëns *Messe de Requiem*. Dr. Bruce Menzies rehearsed with the orchestra in February leading up to the weekend, which was once again hosted at the New England Girls School. At the choral weekend the orchestra and choir were directed by Mr. Paul Holley OAM. The repertoire for the weekend was enjoyable to play and the Sunday performance was successful in attracting a small audience. The ASO instruments and equipment for the weekend were safely transported to and from the venue by Mr. Stuart Pavel and several other ASO committee helpers'. The orchestra and choir members parted ways probably expecting to see each other once again in 2021.

Shortly after the choral weekend, the orchestra started to rehearse for its May 17th concert. This was to be conducted by Mr. Bruce Myers. The concert was to include Kats-Chernin's *Moon Feather Magic*, Mozart's *piano concerto K466* and Schubert's *5th symphony*. This rehearsal was on March the 16th. Three days later, on the 19th of March the Ruby Princess docked in Sydney and passengers disembarked. At the Orchestra's AGM on Monday the 23rd of March, where we attended and practiced social distancing for the first time, it was decided that rehearsals for this concert were to be immediately suspended and the concert was postponed to 2021. The seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic was being explained to the public from NSW health officials and the Chief Medical Officer of Australia. This was to lead to a new era of restrictions on social gatherings that was to have an immediate effect on all community ensembles across Australia and the whole music industry.

The ASO committee continued to meet throughout the pandemic with its initial meeting on May 11th via GoogleMeet where the ASO-NECOM agreement was ratified for the year 2020. The ASO had been without a current agreement to use the building and NECOM as a rehearsal space and this agreement was made by then NECOM CEO Susanne James with the ASO.

The Committee also meet on June 15th to discuss possible online concerts for the orchestra. By this stage, social gathering restrictions were easing and the appetite for the face to face concerts was growing once again. Plans for a possible return to rehearsals in term 3 were made.

The committee meeting on July 20th ratified the ASO's first COVID safety plan and supported the return of ASO rehearsals in term 3 for a proposed September 19th and 20th concert programme co-directed by both Mr. Kees Grenyer and myself. The repertoire for the programme was Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Grainger's *Green Bushes*, Boyce's *Symphony No.1* and Greig's *Holberg Suite*.

ASO rehearsals started back on the 27th of July 2020. Social distancing was in place and shared equipment and stands were cleaned after the rehearsals with the guidance of ASO Covid-safety marshal Christine Davidson. Attendance of all attending rehearsals was to be taken and later a QR code unique to ASO was introduced. It was only the 3rd week into the term 3 rehearsal period when the orchestra faced further COVID-19 restrictions. These restrictions prevented wind and brass instruments from rehearsing in the building. It also led

to the re-assessment of the capacity of the NECOM Auditorium which the ASO had organized for our September concert venue. It was reduced from 125 to just 49 people (including the orchestra). As a result, the repertoire for the concert had to be adjusted to sadly exclude wind and brass players. Music parts and scores for the Copland and Grainger were immediately sent back to Hal Leonard where they had been rented. Works that the Orchestra had access to from the AYO/ASO library including Barber's *Adagio for Strings* and Tchaikovsky's *Adante Cantabile* were then substituted into the programme with string works by *Mark Oconnor* flagged as possible encore items.

The Committee met again on September 20th to decide when and where we could hold the postponed September concert programme. Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions on wind and brass players the November 21st ASO/New England Big Band performance was postponed to 2021. The November weekend was now free to become the possible date for our postponed September concert programme. A sub-committee of the Committee including Kees Grenyer, Stuart Pavel, Rhonda Davies and myself were tasked with investigating the Old Arcadian Theatre (now known as the new Australian Poetry Hall of Fame) as a possible venue suitable for an ASO concert. On inspection of the venue and introduction to the venue's caretaker Mr. James Warren the sub-committee reported back to the committee and it was decided to take the ASO to Guyra.

The ASO booked the Australian Poetry Hall of Fame for a Saturday the 21st of November concert at 3pm and a concert at the NECOM auditorium in Armidale on the Sunday the 22nd of November at 3pm. The concert in Guyra was well attended with over 100 in the audience practicing social distancing. Mr. Kees Grenyer debuted as an ASO conductor and both he and I were very grateful to have had the opportunity to conduct the orchestra for these concerts. The Orchestra also welcomed new members Emily Thompson on Violin and Youp Van duerzen on Double Bass. David Rowe, Kees Grenyer and Randall Bollenhagen and other committee members all volunteered on the weekend to assist in transporting ASO music equipment and stands to and from Guyra. Dr. Bruce Menzies volunteered his time as front of house at the Guyra performance and Christine Davidson acted as our Covid-safety marshal.

The Orchestra followed up the Saturday afternoon concert with a concert in the NECOM Auditorium on the Sunday. Unfortunately, while restrictions had lifted, the NECOM Auditorium still enforced the 49-person capacity and we weren't able to host a larger public performance. With this limited capacity, the concert became exclusively for friends and family of the ASO and was not advertised to the public.

I would like to thank all those in the ASO committee for 2020. There were many meetings throughout the year to discuss the impact of the coronavirus and the direction of the orchestra. It was a tough year for music in general and without the committee's work no rehearsals or concerts would have taken place. It was a challenge for me, but I look forward to playing in many more ASO concerts.

Regards

Robert Jackson
ASO President 2020-2021