

Back to the Trust — Orchestral administration

By 1985 I found myself with no playing work and other work drying up. Carole rang after talking with the Trust's new CEO, Kathleen Norris¹. Her husband, Patrick Veitch, was working at the opera company.

Apparently the Trust needed someone to run the Sydney and the Melbourne Orchestras. I was aware the Orchestras still existed but that was about all I knew! Recordings were my main interest. The Trust Orchestras were not recording as far as I knew, although they did subsequently. I knew they were playing for the opera and ballet but my musical interests were symphonic, chamber music and recordings. I had been to a couple of performances when Carole was with the opera company before we separated. I was interviewed by Kathleen; a meeting set up very quickly and informally. She asked me a few cursory questions about my background which she knew, presumably from Carole. The job was to look after the two orchestras as Senior Orchestral Manager, a title I did not like. She gave me a copy of the recently produced *Tribe Report* (Study into the Future Development of Orchestras in Australia)², saying I would need to read it if I took the job. She advised that the Trust wanted to protect the Orchestras as well as maintain its position by achieving a high standard of orchestral management, for which it had been criticized in the Report. She asked me to recommend what should be done in the light of the Report's recommendations.

The 'Tribe Report'

Before this, I was not aware of the Tribe Committee Inquiry into the future development of orchestras in Australia, commissioned by the Australia Council. My views in relation to freelance orchestras had not been canvassed and I doubt *Edgleys'* views had been canvassed. They had taken over the role of Williamsons, but the Report's focus was on the resources of the subsidized sector including Australian Opera and Australian Ballet. If the committee had been briefed to go sideways, they would have found a wealth of information and influences on the Trust Orchestra and as it subsequently emerged, substantial influences in terms of extra players because that was where they all were. I understood quickly that the Trust was not happy with the Committee's process. It had submitted details but felt the report contained gross errors of fact and of inference in relation to the Trust's management of the Orchestras. This created a whole set of issues



Kathleen Norris, caricature by John Senczuk

¹ Kathleen Norris: Appointed in June 1984, had worked for seventeen years in arts and events management in the United States of America before she came to Australia with her husband, Patrick Veitch.

² Ken Tribe (1914-2010), lawyer; Artistic Director, then President, *Musica Viva* (1966-1973); inaugural member then Chairman, Music Board, Australia Council (1974-77); Commissioner, ABC (1973-1983); committee member, Deaf Society of NSW assisting the initiation of the Theatre of the Deaf; Chair, judging panel Melbourne International Chamber Competition 1989; served on advisory councils for arts training institutions and supporter of Australian Music Centre, Australian Chamber Orchestra and the *Goldner Quartet*, among many others.

for the Trust to deal with. *The Tribe Report* articulated communication was fundamental and needed to be addressed. It recognized if Trust management could not achieve communication, probably new management was necessary. This was not an administrative function, which was really all the Trust could provide. The Orchestras were artistic bodies but were referred to, and administered as, service organizations for the user companies. Those terms set the scene for the way people viewed the Orchestras and the Trust was criticized highly for allowing them to develop along those lines and yet those terms came from the funding body, the Australia Council. *The Tribe Report* clearly states that public funds were given to the Orchestra to serve the Ballet and the Opera, ie the Orchestra was a service industry³. The Australian Ballet and Australia Opera were referred to as 'user companies'; a further step back from the creative, musical identity. Significantly, the Report proposed the Orchestras be independent from the Trust, and the Opera Company wanted to have control over its own orchestra. The Board had discussed the draft *Tribe Report* and decided to appoint a Senior Orchestral Manager.

On January 6th, 1986, I sent Kathleen a response to the proposed job title. I felt it was inappropriate for several reasons and thought it should be Administrator of Orchestras, so that it did not align with one particular Orchestra. This was critical from the musicians' point of view. In my brief reading of the Report I could see a huge minefield to negotiate and the only way I would do it was if my position was recognized as being responsible for the two Orchestras and their managements. Administrator of Orchestras was a very clear statement of what I would be doing. I was concerned about the presence of William Reid, the Trust's Director of Music. I understood he had inherited responsibility for the Orchestras' administration, but had devolved it without much supervision to the individual orchestral managers. I considered my responsibilities should include, 'the creation of job descriptions for all orchestral staff and their implementation.' There had been no job descriptions, resulting in dis-organization. 'The implementation of artistic and Trust policies.' I did not know if they existed but I knew there had to be policies governing these two groups of sixty-nine players in two states with line managements. I would take responsibility for 'Orchestra personnel, managers, assistants and staff in all administrative matters.' There was a logical line of management but it had never been articulated and no-one knew, especially the person at the end of the line. A clear line of management needed to be in place.

I could also see the need to run both orchestral offices. There were no schedules and very little forward planning, something *The Tribe Report* raised. I needed to control the expenditure of monies allocated to the orchestras, not because of any sense of mismanagement but there was no risk management or a proper audit trail. I would have to deal with wage negotiation with staff and players. Players were bound by union rules including proficiency loadings which

³ *Tribe Report* pp 101.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.1 The ownership of the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra should be transferred to The Australian Opera and the ownership of the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra should be transferred to a board of management affiliated to the Victorian Arts Centre Trust; all subsidies now provided to these orchestras by the Australia Council and State Arts Ministries should be redirected to their new owners; all assets designated at present as for the use or support of each orchestra should be transferred to its new owner. Any assets which are presently shared should continue to be available to both orchestras.

6.1.2 Transference of ownership of the Trust orchestras should be completed within the minimum period necessary to an orderly and successful process which protects to the maximum extent the maintenance of orchestral services at a high standard and the uninterrupted security and welfare of orchestral members. The Study Group believes that such a transfer should be completed by 1 January, 1986.

6.1.3 Transferral of ownership of the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra to The Australian Opera is conditional upon an agreement by it that:

- a) the orchestra will not be toured within Australia for more than four weeks a year without explicit approval of the Australia Council as funding body;
- b) it will present the orchestra in concerts of the symphonic repertoire, in a primarily non-accompanying role, at least three times per year, and will present orchestral members in chamber ensemble recitals with appropriate frequency;
- c) it will provide equitable opportunities to The Australian Ballet for use of the orchestra when performing in Sydney;
- d) it will submit to arbitration of unresolved disputes between itself and The Australian Ballet over use of the orchestra;
- e) the services of the orchestra will be provided to other bodies in a rank ordering of users.

6.1.4 If funding is available, the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra should be increased in size sufficiently to allow satisfactory rotation of string players, with benefits to orchestra quality and players' working conditions.

6.1.5 Transfer of ownership of the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra to the Victorian Arts Centre Trust is conditional upon agreement by its board of management that:

- a) the orchestra's services will be made available in the first instance to serve the reasonable needs of The Australian Opera, The Australian Ballet and the Victoria State Opera in Victoria subject to the conditions set forth in paragraph b);
- b) pending provision of orchestral services to the touring Australian Ballet by professional orchestras resident in the cities visited, EMO will continue to tour with The Australian Ballet outside Victoria, an arrangement which is to be possible for a period not extending beyond 31 December, 1988; it is noted that cessation of the EMO tour with The Australian Ballet for its December Sydney season will depend either upon finding additional subsidy to fund other orchestral services to accompany that season, or establishment of a ballet season in Melbourne instead of Sydney for that or some other month;
- c) the orchestra will be presented in concerts of the symphonic repertoire, in a primarily non-accompanying role, at least three times per year, and its members presented in chamber ensemble recitals with appropriate frequency;
- d) the orchestra's remaining time is apportioned among a rank ordering of users.

Notwithstanding b) above, it is the intention of the recommendations for the EMO that it will become resident year-round in Melbourne as soon as orchestral resources are supplied to the national companies on tour outside Victoria.

6.1.6 The EMO's activities should be closely integrated into the needs of the VACT and of major Victorian and national user groups in Victoria. If subsidy, sponsorship, or increased earned income permits, this orchestra should be expanded up to a strength of 95 players, at which size it would be capable of splitting to provide two services simultaneously. Otherwise, it should be maintained at least at its present strength of 69.

could be negotiated if you were an exceptionally good player. It was up to the artistic director to decide what you might negotiate. It was out of the hands of management and information rarely came back until Bill Reid advised the orchestral manager to pay extra. I recommended undertaking effective union liaison, which was non-existent. There was no system of regular meetings; communication was usually in reaction to a complaint from a user company, and these were not dealt with in a structured way.

The public image of the Orchestra and management needed to be addressed. There was a perception this was a pit orchestra, and the management was a bit shambolic and haphazard. Investigating new areas of orchestra involvement to widen the scope of available players for extra positions was necessary as it was struggling to find good players to fill positions when someone wanted leave. There were other general administrative areas to be dealt with, the day-to-day things which everyone takes for granted: pay-slips, the signing of releases for a recording, copyright release, and where such documents are generated. There was no office or storage; there was no system.

The Tribe Report—Addressing the Issues

Taking on this job, I inherited a number of serious issues, not only to do with the low morale of the musicians but funding questions related to the Australia Council's view of the Trust and its need for more money to improve the quality. I admit I was unaware of quite what I was taking on. It seemed likely the Melbourne Orchestra would be handed over to an independent management body first and the musicians were confused. Their view about staying or going fluctuated over time. In 1985 there was a big downturn in the whole music scene and the Australian Opera was announcing it might have to become part-time from 1987 unless it received assurance of adequate funding, which had a knock-on effect on the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra. When I came back to the Trust my *modus operandi* in the music industry had been very different. With government funding you are accountable for public money so working methods were different, but I did have knowledge and skills to draw on when negotiating with the Australian Ballet and Australian Opera over all the thorny issues that had been sitting there for years, and was able to come up with immediate responses. With large sums of money and government grants involved, you had to be sure advice given was correct but for operational issues I could answer on the spot. It enabled communication with the union and user companies to be more efficient and reliable and at meetings generally we came away with satisfactory outcomes, including identification of next steps.

There was going to be a problem negotiating my way with Bill Reid, setting a standard for the orchestras and having the orchestral managements know it was to me they came for decisions,

support or criticism. The first thing was to meet with management staff and hear what they had to say. I asked how they worked and ran rehearsals. I went into nitty-gritty issues such as number of rehearsals, setting up and moving the orchestra, who looked after the instruments. Things I knew to be relevant and of interest to the musicians, even if they were not interested in the Trust management. Kathleen Norris did not need to know about getting a specialist to move cellos and basses but I wanted to know how it worked. The offices at the back of theatres or in the East Melbourne church hall were dis-organized and lacking basic resources. Once I asked for a Trust letterhead in the Melbourne office and none could be found. This was housekeeping and once you got it right, you could say the facility was in place and should be used in a managerial way. Such as a rostering form for a player to fill in what they wanted and why. This is submitted, taken to the user company for discussion and maybe negotiation. A paper trail is created rather than verbal agreements which could come as a surprise to the conductor who may have agreed after a performance without taking into account the impact of an absence or replacement on the rest of the section. Documentation was needed and was pulled together within six months. I was not popular with the orchestral managers but they came to accept it as necessary.

In Melbourne there was Peter Narroway, in Sydney, John Miller. Peter was a willing and capable manager, efficient and happy to give me all the information I needed. He sent monthly reports on how things are going. When we came to the point of transferring the orchestra and negotiating with the musicians, the Trust and the unions, I was in Melbourne for a day or two every fortnight. In Sydney it was a different matter; like pulling teeth with John Miller. It took time to get simple information from him. For the first few weeks I had daily meetings realizing he was protecting his turf and wanted to retain complete control over decisions. One of these was rostering, a big problem with the Opera Company. I obliged an unwilling John to come to my office, away from distractions at the Opera House. A weekly written report on the orchestra seemed the only way to focus on the issues. Eventually, after about a year, he was giving detailed and accurate verbal reports.

It took time to get the management functioning as management, reporting on policies to a senior authority. They existed. Bill Reid and others had set them up; whether they were good policies or not was not the issue; it was whether they were being enacted, followed and working. For issues relating to user companies, the ballet or opera, these had to be addressed immediately and fixed. When I finally had rapport with the managers, I asked about real issues confronting the musicians (not pit size or suitable chairs), but conflicts in relationships with the user companies. It was a fact-finding quest.

Based in an office at the Trust headquarters in Dowling Street, I had a good secretary, space to meet with the management and access to the rest of the building's facilities. The Sydney

orchestral management was in two small dressing rooms in the back of the pit in the Opera House. Inadequate from a management point of view but they survived. There was the orchestral manager, an assistant manager and a secretary, who printed schedules, received communications from musicians, generally things like doctors' certificates. Peter, the assistant, did the physical setting up of the pit and moving instruments to the rehearsal studio. He rostered with John to be on site for performances. With so many calls a week they split that up. John signed off on the pays each week and I discovered later there were arrangements he made with musicians about rostering that did not go past his desk. Bill Reid never knew and the companies did not find out until the conductor was on the podium and found a new clarinet player in position. They were not happy about that.

The Australian Chamber Orchestra Early Days

There were still musicians in the orchestras with whom I had played between 1967 and 1972. They did not know me as an administrator and I had been out of the country for a while, during which time the Australian Chamber Orchestra began under Trust administration in 1974 and gave its first concerts in 1975. An initiative assisted by the administrator of the orchestras, Ken Mackenzie-Forbes, it was driven by musicians, John Painter and Nathan Waks. Members of the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra and the Robert Pikler Chamber Orchestra joined the Australian Chamber Orchestra. It had a management committee including John and Nathan, and the Trust gave administrative assistance. It was providing work opportunities for musicians outside the ABC and Trust orchestras. They were aiming for a very high standard of music making, although they implemented the early decision not to appoint a musical director. To establish anything that has any musical worth, you must have a clear way forward in terms of artistic

Carl Pini and the Australian Chamber Orchestra,
Trust News, September 1988.



standards before you start. Otherwise, if you do not self-destruct, the critics and the public will destroy you.

Concertmaster Robert Ingram, the leader, was brought in with Nathan Waks, cello, Winifred Durie, viola, and Brecon Carter, violin, to help raise the standards of the Trust Sydney Orchestra. It was clearly a good move. All were excellent players and useful in providing assistance and guidance to younger players. They were now members of the Chamber Orchestra, along with Carl Pini, violin, back from London and a member of the Sydney String Quartet, sitting next to Bob on the front desk. Carl left the orchestra subsequently. **Today it is a very different ensemble.** Its first concert on 21st November 1975 was conducted by Robert Pikler and Georg Tintner. Tours to Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and regional areas were undertaken through *Musica Viva*. Donald MacDonald⁴ was involved in assisting its development.

Trust Colleagues

When I began work in early 1986, Andrew Briger was the Trust Chairman, the Company Secretary was Don Grace and staff included Jeff Kovel, actor Wendy Blacklock and comedian, actor and producer, Noel Ferrier, who was head of musical theatre. The NSW Theatre of the Deaf, directed by Patrick Mitchell, was based there. Roger Taylor was head of technical facilities, Michael James ran the costume department and Carole Long⁵ was Manager of the membership department. There were Trust representatives and offices in Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide (**1986 Annual Report**). It was a very vibrant place. Heads of Departments met weekly with Kathleen, downstairs at a big boardroom table. I attended one or two Trust Board meetings as an observer, and delivered a paper to one meeting when Andrew Briger wanted to hear my views on the orchestra transfers. Kathleen kept all of the managers away from the Board.

Pam Andrews, in the entrepreneurial section, was an outstanding super-efficient manager and put together the basics of an entrepreneurial show with Jeff Kovel and subsequently John Woodland. I had a fair bit to do with those people informally and more formally later when I started Australian Orchestral Enterprises⁶. David Martin, the son of Lloyd Martin, General Manager of the Opera House, was publicity officer. He had an almost impossible task: The Trust was under attack, it seemed, from everyone. This was the first time I saw how maligned the Trust was in the public eye, yet they were doing a great deal with a very competent staff.

Jeff Kovel had looked after the Sydney side of *Edgleys* and was first rate. Patrick was innovative and creative with the **Theatre of the Deaf**, particularly in relation to schools' programs. Entrepreneurial activities were often in conjunction with **Pat Condon and Michael Edgley** as

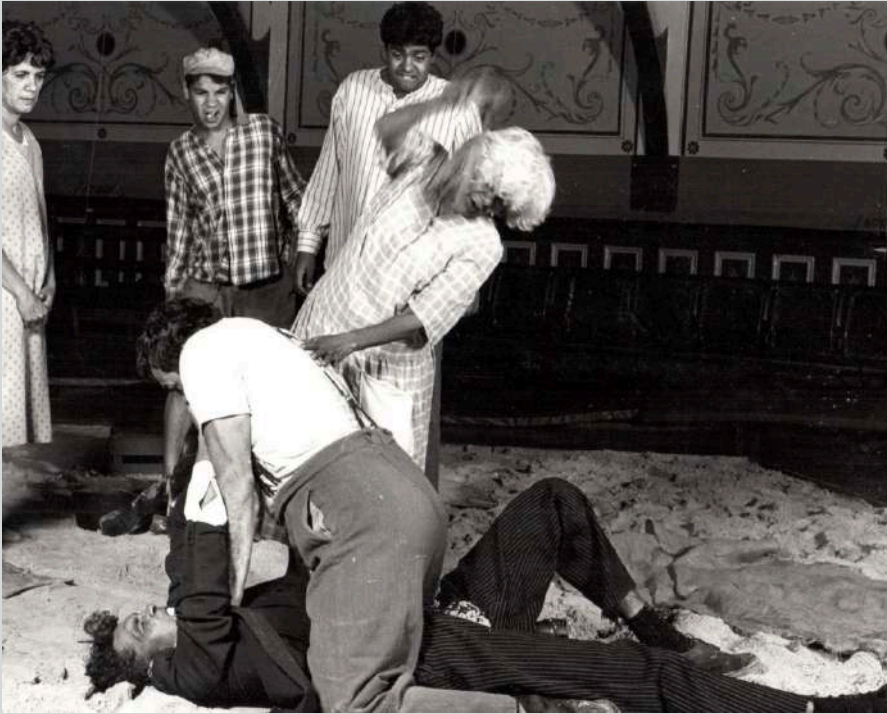


Caricature of Noel Ferrier—*Trust News*, September 1988.

⁴ Donald McDonald, AO, AC (born 1938), Australian arts administrator, held executive positions with Sydney Theatre Company, *Musica Viva* and The Australian Opera (1986-1996). Was Chairman of the ABC 1996-2006, and Director of the Australian Classification Board 2007-2012.

⁵ Carole Long was Membership Manager 1973-1988. She died after a short illness in 1989.

⁶ See Chapter 7.



No Sugar by Jack Davis, Western Australia Theatre Company 1990 with Lynette Narkle, Kelton Pell, John Moore, Morton Hansen, Ernie Dingo and Dot Collard. Photo: Gary Summerfield.

was building indigenous work in the Australian Content Department. Jack Davis's play, *No Sugar*, toured around Australia and overseas (*Trust News* December 1988).

It was a vibrant and flourishing activity which became independent, as **Performing Lines**, when the Trust went into provisional liquidation.

There was a large Trust membership of nearly 10,000. Although I had less dealings with this department, I felt that members, although they joined primarily to get access to tickets and especially to first nights, needed the message they were members to support what the Trust did. Support can include attendance, talking positively about the Trust in your community and counteracting negative views, as well as donating. Even \$5 a year from each member would have been very helpful.

Don Grace was company secretary and financial controller. He helped me understand the budget set for the orchestras, which was a complex document. I was thrown in the deep end when I started and had to draft a budget for the next funding period. This had to be delivered annually in October and there was no negotiation with the Australia Council. I learnt to read balance sheets and financial reports but Don showed me a way through the minefield of figures

co-partners, who, if the Trust had not been efficient, would have stopped collaborating. There were many shared promotions including the Dance Theatre of Harlem (**1980 Annual Report**) for which I had put together an orchestra. The relationship with the Trust was first rate in terms of their efficiency. Once in the job I could see these people under attack all the time. It seemed whatever you did was wrong and criticized. Many arts administrators had worked for the Trust in their early careers; maybe it was a case of the children having a go at their parents when they had the muscle and the power to do so.

The staff was under stress to meet budgets and make a success of shows. The Entrepreneurial Department had successful visits by Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald.

The Theatre of the Deaf was expanding into educational areas and Wendy Blacklock



Ella Fitzgerald

and how to put a draft budget together until arriving at the final document. My annual report included recommendations and requests for increases in establishment funding, which were always there for extra players. The acquittal of the existing grant was a nightmare. The Australia Council wanted to know about every penny, chapter and verse about over-spends for extra instruments, allowances and additional penalty rates musicians were entitled to. I would have to cite the award modification, including the action in the Industrial Commission that produced it and provide the industrial document, put together by William (Bill) Parlour, our industrial advocate. It was labour and time consuming: a huge amount of paperwork which I did every day to keep on top of it. Some 20% of my time was spent acquitting the Australia Council grant. With no computer or e-mail, I

had something better: Ann Robinson, the secretary, who was wonderfully efficient. I came to rely on her; when we did a budget we would use last year's figures, analyze how they broke down for Melbourne and Sydney, explain fluctuations and include the coming year's anticipated increase. Ann would give me a spreadsheet the next day. Computers do not do that.

I do not think the Trust understood the implications of *The Tribe Report*, what it meant to transfer sixty-nine people in both Melbourne and Sydney, whose Trust employment would cease at the end of the year. Tribe had put together recommendations to be met by the user companies, the new managers of the orchestra, whoever they were going to be, and the Australia Council. He had been very polite, but the expectation was these things had to be done, otherwise transfer could not happen. These orchestras were part and parcel of the whole orchestral scene in Australia. The report involved a bigger picture than just the Trust, which had only been involved in the music industry through entrepreneurial activities, not in anything like the huge recording industry in relation to film-making, or the ABC Orchestras in every state. Kathleen Norris was dismayed at what was before her. The report was a hard read, with many cross-references and views, including those of individual players. Some were not representative of the orchestra, even



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if they claimed to be. I knew some of the players with strong views, such as Peter King, Philip Mendel and Richard Runnels. They were prepared to make statements and agitate for transfer.

There was merit in some of the recommendations but whether the Trust deserved it or not was not my place to decide. Kathleen wanted to know how to keep the orchestras and what it would entail. This was not easy to answer because reasons both ways had to be considered. I had to be diplomatic because she was the CEO and I assumed she had Board support for decision-making processes. To advise her in opposition to Tribe's recommendation would be not a good thing to put to the Trust directors without clear understanding. There were several issues; the need for the orchestras to fulfill the expectations of the opera and ballet companies; to develop as artistic bodies of good repute and good quality; and to progress forward in terms of establishment of players, adequate rostering and good work conditions.

Good Management needs Good Communication

There was the need for the orchestras to have good management, of which the report was most critical of the Trust. There were clear indications it considered the management inadequate. Communication had lapsed between orchestras and management, notwithstanding the orchestral committees, union stewards and a group of Trust Board directors who met with members of the orchestra to discuss issues. Effective day to day communication was not happening. It generally had to wait for one of those forums and many petty things never got to the table. Petty things, if not resolved, fester and become major issues and this had happened in both orchestras. Again, because of lack of strong artistic direction, this was one of the major criticisms in the report. I do not think anyone could have disputed the findings. Rather than ask the Trust 'to get their act together', it was recommended the orchestras be moved to new management with a proper structure. It is speculative as to whether they should have stayed with the Trust, which was having problems with funding.

Ultimately, funding problems were threatening the very existence of the Trust as it carried a debt of some \$70,000, which the Australia Council should have paid years before, and was now impossible to recoup. The report also recommended the Trust transfer the musical instruments used by the members of the orchestra but they did not belong to the players. They had been bought by the Trust Ladies' Committee⁷ through fundraising and donated to the orchestra. There was considerable fiscal value on those instruments but *The Tribe Report* did not consider or investigate that issue. There were questions the Trust CEO had to come to terms with and understand before they could mount a proper response. Having read the report, I interviewed the orchestral managers. The players were not communicating, nor were the orchestral managers.

⁷ Social, fund-raising group for many years organized by Shirley Hay.

They would say one thing and go back on their word, making management stance on an issue uncertain and unreliable. There was not a friendly relationship with the Musicians' Union and in industrial issues you need a relationship where you can at least talk.

There were a lot of personal issues involved. When people did not get something they would take it personally. It had gone long past the point of being able to discuss and agree or disagree on issues. It was about personal animosity and communication, especially from the Sydney Orchestra. Regardless of the *Edgley* style, this was a time when agreements had to be in writing; disputes needed to be identified and policies put in place. Rostering was done between the orchestral manager and the player and it often did not go to the Orchestra. Soon after my arrival there was a file note: 'Horn player going off for the entire Ballet season.' No reason given or any discussion in writing as to who had agreed this or whether the information had been communicated to the relevant user company or other players in the section.

From these discussions, I derived some twenty points of management which should have been done yesterday and certainly tomorrow! These became my goals:

- Raise the standards of managerial efficiency, musical performance and discipline.
- Improve orchestral morale.
- Personalize the relationship between orchestral manager and players.
- Provide a good line of communication between myself, the players and the managers of the orchestras.
- Make immediate decisions.
- Management to stand firm on their decisions.
- Take responsibility for all policy decisions.
- Provide good, friendly communication with the Musicians' Union.
- Treat musicians as individuals, not payroll numbers.
- Arrange and confirm all bookings and appointments by phone with immediate written follow-up.
- Advise all conditions at time of booking with no grey areas.
- Post rosters and changes well in advance.
- Address the roster problem.
- Revise the casual player system of engagement.
- Fight for better wages.
- Do not rely on the Union for improvements.
- Improve conditions of employment to attract principal players.
- Encourage the Ballet Company to engage better conductors.
- Establish a working environment of no surprises from any source.
- Open the management to frank, friendly and confidential communication with all the players and try to find some solution to the pit problem.

After I drafted the management requirements for Kathleen, there was a requirement to try and place the orchestras in a public arena outside of opera; to treat the musicians as individuals,

not payroll numbers. The orchestras were losing identity, swamped by the needs of the internationally profiled Australian Opera and Australian Ballet. They were required to meet a high standard without recognition. Tribe recommended there should be at least three concerts given by the orchestras in the public domain outside of opera or ballet. He was critical of the Trust for not doing this. One of the big problems was that few people knew the orchestras.

Sydney Trust Opera/Ballet Orchestra

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra members were named in concert programs and recognized. Audiences knew who the leader or principal cellist was and expected to see and hear them at a concert. With opera you go for the singers; Donald Smith singing Mario in *Tosca* or Dame Joan Sutherland singing Lucia. Occasionally for the ballet, a musician like Maurice Stead played a solo, or a harpist had a solo which may mean the player was identified, but it was brief and they could not be seen in the pit where everyone was dressed in black. Finding a name in the program was difficult because the orchestra were in small print and often both Sydney and Melbourne Orchestras were listed in the season program even if they were not playing that performance.

The presentation of the orchestras did not exist, save for the fact they played for ballet and opera. One objective of concerts is to give players opportunity to play music they do not normally play, and might enjoy while raising standards with challenges to meet and boost morale. For an audience, it is a great opportunity to identify with individual players.

There was an issue with dress code; I felt strongly about presentation and was worried about the time coming when we would no longer wear dinner suits in the pit. The notion of dressing up in the pit was changing and many players, unless with the Sydney or Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, where you had to wear tails, were resistant to bow ties and wanted to wear black skivvies. For me, looking good impacted on the way the orchestras presented and the audience received them, especially for platform concerts and events such as simulcasts. The Sydney Orchestra accompanied the Australian Opera for a simulcast of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in early 1986, and there were other simulcasts organized by the Australian Opera and the ABC, with the broadcaster in charge of the production. We had to schedule in such a way as not to interfere with the running of the season and to be careful we were rostering to get the right people at the right time. I would give a direction to John Miller to solve problems with players who wanted leave at such a time. Whatever negotiation took place, I did not know the terms but it was generally solved because simulcasts carried extra money, so very few people would be unavailable.



Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra—1987

Getting Out of the Pit

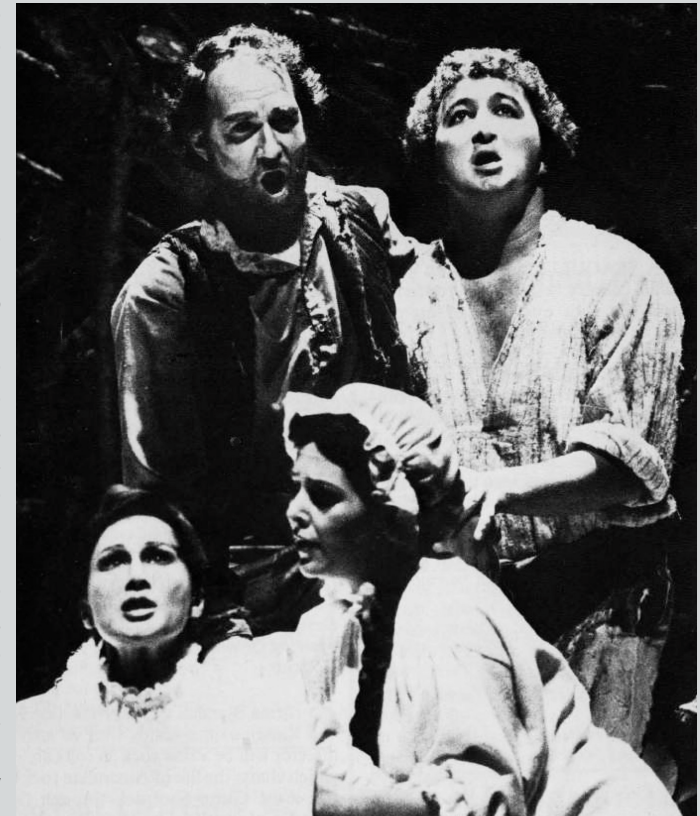
The Sydney Orchestra presented some concerts in early March 1986 which were seen as morale boosters for the musicians but there were issues. Not everyone was convinced they needed to do concerts; to get out of the pit to keep their balance correct. There were some who wanted to do a concert out of the city, and others who did not want to travel large instruments for one-off concerts. They would suggest changes to the repertoire to avoid taking all the percussion instruments, for example. These were problems to be solved. There was money to pay for these with Australia Council funding, but scheduling them, often at the end of a season before the beginning of the rehearsals for the next, was tricky. It was about the only time there was a spare day, at the end of an opera season before the ballet started. Often the ballet would be rehearsing on the tail end of the opera or vice versa, but there was always a Friday or Saturday night for a concert and on some occasions the user companies would reschedule or drop a couple of their calls.

It was getting the enthusiasm of the orchestra which was the hardest and this usually came from the conductor, in this case William Reid. For these March 1986 concerts, the soloist selected was a high profile pianist, Pamela Page⁸, but I wanted the program to focus on the Sydney Orchestra and less on conductor and soloist without offending them. The centre-fold of the program contained the list of players, the first thing readers saw, and in big font. On the left hand side, the conductor and soloist were featured. Normally, it would have been the reverse. There was a welcome from the Trust chairman; it was time for the public to understand the Trust was proud of this orchestra. They had put on concerts before but they had never made that statement. On the right hand side was the program and music notes, while on the reverse there were six photographs of players with instruments taken in rehearsal; not posed but showing them in action, working in their environment. In the centre was the name of the orchestra and the concert, *Great Romantic Classics*.

This program was presented in two big Sydney population areas where potentially there would be good audiences: the Sutherland Entertainment Centre and the City of Willoughby's Chatswood Civic Centre (now The Concourse). Possibly 95% of the audience had never seen these musicians before, nor understood what a timpanist did. On this occasion it was Jack Purden, concentrating and playing his drums on the move, depending on the music. Perhaps for the first time audience members saw how a French horn or piccolo was played. Sadly, the musicians did not seem to think this was special or unusual but it needed to be done, capitalized on, and developed. I think Bill Reid had run his course and was worn out. In the early days there were quite strong statements coming from him on a regular basis about what needed to be done, but nearly twenty years later nothing had been done. He retired in July 1986.

In 1986 there were two contemporary Australian works in the orchestras' repertoire; a short Carl Vine work for a ballet *Triple Bill* and Richard Meale's *Voss* for the Opera Company.⁹ *Voss* was a

⁸ Pamela Page (b.1934), Australian pianist, studied Trinity College of Music, London, has given many recitals and broadcasts including duet programs with husband, pianist Max Olding. Was Senior Lecturer at Faculty of Music, University of Queensland. Their son is violist Dene Olding.
⁹ Carl Vine AO (b.1954), pianist, composer, Artistic Director Musica Viva since 2000 and Huntington Estate Music Festival since 2006. In 2005 received Don Banks Award for outstanding contribution to Australian Music. Currently Senior Lecturer in Composition, Conservatorium of Sydney.
 Richard Meale (1932-2009), Australian composer. His opera *Voss*, with libretto by David Malouf (b.1934), was based on Patrick White's novel *Voss* (1957) and commissioned by the Australian Opera who premiered the work at the Adelaide Festival in 1986.



Clockwise from top left: Geoffrey Chard (Voss), Gregory Tomlinson (Harry), Anne-Maree McDonald (Belle) and Marilyn Richardson (Laura) in the Australian Opera's production of *Voss*—1986

significant work for the orchestra that year and many players enjoyed being part of it. When such works come in, some welcome them as a breath of fresh air, a change from Gilbert and Sullivan or the standard Mozart and Wagner opera repertoire. With ballet there is more contemporary music but it favours the dance rather than the music. The opera favours the music, so with a contemporary work like *Voss*, it is about the music. A contemporary ballet often moves the tempi around to the point where it is unmusical, making players dislike ballet music.

There can be a dichotomy in an orchestra when people have to play works as part of their job, while others are enthusiastic and approach the music with enjoyment. Looking back at the names of players in the Trust orchestras, I realize seating order can work against the strength of sections. I believe you seat people in order of what is required of the section which does not necessarily mean the best player will be on the front desk. In London orchestras, often there is a fabulous player on the back desk of the firsts because that is where strength is needed. That philosophy was not apparent in Australia at the time. It is not the individual players at all, it is how they are galvanized, put together and presented, which determines how well they do. They could probably go to the next level if given the objective to get a high quality sound, outside of the pit, in recording situations. This is artistic direction, 'fine-tuning', which is very difficult to distinguish when listening to them in the Sydney Opera House pit. Being encumbered with a pit should not kill the quality of the orchestra that plays in it.

In April 1986 the Australia Council put in place an implementation committee to transfer the Melbourne orchestra to the Victorian Arts Centre Trust by 1st January 1987. The committee met in May in Melbourne and included John Bates, George Fairfax, the head of the VACT, representatives of the musicians' committee, the leader, myself, and others. The Victorian Arts Minister was in attendance. The agenda was to discuss what was going to happen and how. While no real decisions were made, industrial issues were noted and left to John and me. The Melbourne Orchestra's Musicians' Association voted thirty-three to eight in favour of transfer. The Trust was disappointed the musicians had gone directly to the Australia Council with their view, having hoped for a confidential ballot of musicians to see if the view was actually different.

The Trust was also anxious to continue negotiations for the sale of instrument assets at their present value, hoping the new orchestra management would purchase the instruments. This did not happen and there was little enthusiasm overall from the musicians who thought they could have new ones from a new management. There were no classic instruments, no old violins or special items of merit. Given promises of great support from the Arts Centre, there was expectation from the Melbourne players that they would be looked after. There were political reasons for these promises, but some interpreted this to mean new instruments, especially as some of the Trust instruments in use were old or not well maintained. In the case of the timpani,

which involved major cost, Sydney timpanist, David Clarence, wanted to use these. There were Wagner horns only used for his works and possibly some Richard Strauss orchestral works. The only organization with a reason to own these was the Opera Company who might use them once every five years. There was disinterest, although the instruments were in good condition. The Trust wanted everything documented and I had them assessed and valued in relation to the market.

Transfer Concerns

As I worked towards the transfers, my immediate concern was that an orchestra should not become an exclusive opera orchestra, or managed by the Opera, because it would lose its identity. Set up to play opera and ballet, they were not necessarily to be identified as opera or ballet orchestras. I feared Melbourne would become a ballet orchestra and Sydney an opera orchestra, which was not good for the players. Orchestras should do a variety of work and be structured so that people are rostered off for periods of time. Players should be fully employed for the year with a constant salary, a maximum of six months in the pit and some time playing chamber music or recordings. When that happens, you remain fresh. If you become an opera orchestra player, that is all you do, so your capacity to develop as a chamber musician is limited, unless you work away from the orchestra. The musical awareness learnt in other genres of music is contributory to core work. All those experiences help musical maturity when playing opera. Time away from the pit works perfectly well in places like New York and London because they are seasonal. At the end of a season, musicians have time to go to summer schools or chamber music festivals and come back refreshed and revived. I was concerned the orchestras would become specialized; a reason to stay with the Trust, who always believed and hoped the orchestras would be broad-based to cover a range of music, including stage productions. Although this did not happen due to lack of funds and artistic direction, it was Trust policy. I thought the Trust should not lose the orchestras with that intention, but I had to willingly revise my position when I saw Melbourne going to a management that understood and had plans on the table to diversify the activities.

Melba ATN 7 TV – Sydney Orchestra

In 1986 the Sydney Orchestra made recordings for the *ATN-7 TV series Melba* based on the life of Australian operatic soprano Nellie Melba, which was shown on air in 1988. Extracts from eight operas were recorded in four sessions and paid at commercial rates. On average, players received \$268 for this. It was one of my philosophies that touched on the artistic side. I believed the orchestra had to develop a reliable list of people who could be used as extras and the only way to do that was to have a commercial relationship with these people. The orchestra itself



A scene for the ATN-7 mini-series *Melba*. Photo courtesy Oliver Sullivan Productions.

could and should find commercial opportunities when it came to enhance not only their financial returns but also artistic returns. This session was offered in the light of my previous experience with the recording industry. I could have fixed a freelance orchestra, but the producers, with advice from *Kennedy-Miller*, wanted an orchestra with a name.¹⁰ I convinced them there was an orchestra with expertise that would be perfect; they could use the name although some players were not members of the orchestra. I put an orchestra together, basically freelance, led by Robert Ingram, with many people from the Sydney Orchestra; an extra date for them. If they complained about doing extra work, I advised they did not have to, but when they realized they would lose a session fee that complaint disappeared. Yvonne Kenny¹¹ sang *Melba*. It was

¹⁰ *Kennedy-Miller Australia*, founded by George Miller and Byron Kennedy in 1978 in Sydney as producer of Australian film and television. Since 2009 called Kennedy Miller Mitchell also producing video games.

¹¹ Yvonne Kenny (b. 1950-), Australian soprano, opera singer.

a successful recording financially and artistically. The orchestra played incredibly well. Having experienced opera people in the orchestra made a great deal of difference. Having someone like the respected Ingram leading, brought quality to the recording and there was no compromise at all. This was the first time I found extra work for them; it was disappointing they did not think such experiences were necessary. As a musician I find this hard to comprehend.

Robert Ingram and Ronald Thomas

The music producer hoped to use the orchestra again but there was a growing disciplinary problem stemming from a lack of musical artistic direction and it seemed essential the next step be to appoint a strong artistic director and a concertmaster. Ingram was able to solve disciplinary problems such as shuffling and making noise when they should not; unintentional disruption, not being properly disciplined as a session musician. In a live recording session with a singer, you have to stop any noise related to things like page turning. Robert was able to negotiate that. At the time we did not know what the future would bring; I could make no promises of availability so that was the only occasion we had an association with *Kennedy-Miller*. I negotiated with Ingram to be concertmaster and Ronald Thomas to be artistic director for the Sydney Orchestra, but knew it was dependent on offering adequate funds and attractive conditions. I wanted Ingram to be involved as he had been a successful adviser in the past and could have helped the orchestra understand the musical issues and outcomes of transfer. He was tactful, experienced and highly respected as a player. He could also step in and play difficult works when necessary. I could not get Ingram interested. Having been involved in the past, he recognized the orchestra was not going to listen. Ronald and I worked together in England where he was conductor of the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, a member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and started the *London Virtuosi*, a group of key players, who all played standing: the first time this had been done. They very successfully played baroque and Mozart, to an incredibly high standard. When he arrived back in Australia looking for work, I suggested the Trust. He had several recordings: in the 1980s *Gramophone UK* judged his recording as the best Beethoven Violin Concerto on CD at the time. In London it was a best seller for a long time. He would have been invaluable, particularly with his wealth of experience. He agreed on condition he continue playing. The first thing I arranged was for him to play the Mendelsohn Concerto with the Melbourne Orchestra. Then he joined the Sydney Orchestra; once again they were negative and did not want to know. At the same time Ronald did not want to let the impetus go from London.

I was looking at the Soloists of Australia, which Ron had assembled and directed, with the idea of managing them. This was all part of my philosophy that an orchestral division of the Trust, if it lost the two orchestras, might have another role and help the two orchestras or at



The Soloists of Australia in concert.

least the Sydney Orchestra if it developed work for good freelance players I knew were sitting doing nothing. These were players who had opted out of the Sydney Symphony and other orchestras and were making recordings. The Soloists comprised of concertmasters of ABC Orchestras; friends and colleagues of Ron's during his long career, including Robert Ingram, Barbara Gilby from the Tasmanian Orchestra, Robert Cooper from the South Australian Orchestra, Berian Evans, viola player from Western Australia, John Gray, double bass and Cathy Finnis, cello; the cream of Australia's players. The group released its first recording in December 1986. The following year, they performed Vivaldi, Mozart and Bach concerti with an ensemble of about ten in the Concert Hall during the Perth Festival. The morning

after the evening concert they recorded the program, without an audience, in the concert venue. This was recorded by *Chandos* with whom Ronald had a relationship from London. Their two recordings, *The Soloists of Australia, Volume 1 and Volume 2*, are excellent and benchmarks of some of Australia's best players at that time. Ron came back to Sydney and that was the last of it. There were too many people involved, with other major concerns, to get them together and they were all in different states. Ronald was not a very good organizer in terms of juggling dates. He wanted me to do that. David Blenkinsop was looking after them in Western Australia and he wanted me to find opportunities in the eastern states. I also tried to organize tours to America and Europe for the Soloists in 1988 but it was impossible to get the players together.

Whilst Ron was with the Trust orchestra I thought it of benefit to him, and good for the orchestra, to have such a high profile music director. I could not find funding and player availability was restricted substantially by their work schedules elsewhere, which had to be their first consideration. After a year Ron returned to London, and revived his solo career. He came back to Australia some years later. Both Ingram and Thomas would have been very good for the Sydney Orchestra but I doubt the orchestra was capable of taking that kind of direction. They really wanted a conductor. We canvassed them for their views and the strong voices wanted a conductor who specialized in opera because that is what they played. It made it very difficult to

do anything with the orchestra and it was not my place to intervene artistically. It would have affected the smoothness of the transfer. It was hard enough building the relationship we needed to affect their transfer with industrial security.

I was always invited to ballet and opera opening nights. I could not accept every invitation although I was interested to see how the orchestras worked. I would have had to have kept my mouth shut if I found something I did not like. Mostly I attended concerts or events in the Domain where there were complex, behind the scenes, management requirements and these were my responsibility. These events, presented as part of the annual Sydney Festival, were expertly organized by the Festival's Operations Manager/Executive Producer, John Moulton¹². He had been the Production Manager for the Helpmann/Nureyev *Don Quixote* film in 1973 and it was a pleasure to work with him for the orchestra's Domain concerts.

I saw many performances and some rehearsals, but basically, I had two jobs; to improve management quality, policies and managers' performance, all of which was achievable, even with John Miller; and to negotiate the potential transfer of the two orchestras, involving many industrial issues. I arrived at the office about 8am and did not leave until 7 or 8pm, so missed a lot of performances. I kept such a routine during that time or I would not have covered the ground. As we moved closer to the transfers, negotiations with the musicians, both through their representative committees and one-on-one, were increasing, especially in Melbourne, where I gave time privately to every musician in the orchestra to hear and help them deal with concerns. This took an enormous amount of time.

In 1986 Trust attention was focused on what to do with the Dowling Street building; to renovate or sell. There were issues with asbestos as well as financial issues. The premises were dilapidated and it was a difficult building to work in, although because of its position and size, it was a property asset for the Trust. Entrepreneurial activities included a co-production and tour of *The Pirates of Penzance* with the Victorian State Opera and the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra and *Edgleys' Torvill and Dean*¹³ tour. To accompany the Netherlands Dance Theatre in 1986 in Melbourne, the Australian Philharmonic Orchestra came together with casual players I had been using. It was run by conductor Paul Coppens¹⁴. When I left *Edgleys* he kept those contacts and established the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra. He had used that name with an orchestra

¹² John Robert Moulton (1942-2014), born New Zealand, moved to Australia in 1961, joined Australian Ballet in 1962 where he became Stage Director. After 11 years with the company, he was appointed Deputy Technical Manager at the Sydney Opera House and was Stage Director for many years for the House's New Year's Eve events as well as working with Sydney Festival Director Stephen Hall for events in the Domain. As Deputy Director Australian Bicentennial Special Events NSW, he masterminded and organized Australia Day 1988 on Sydney Harbour. He managed many large scale cultural events before becoming General Manager of Sydney's Capitol Theatre.

¹³ Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, English ice skaters who became world famous at the 1984 Winter Olympics with their free-dance interpretation of Ravel's *Bolero* which earned them a gold medal. They toured an ice skating/dance presentation to Australia and elsewhere after winning the world professional championships five times.

¹⁴ Paul Coppens, born in the Netherlands, emigrated to Australia in 1955. Studied conducting at Graz Music University, Austria. Founded the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra in 1973 and the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra in 1975. Between 1974 and 1999 was Music Director/Assistant Conductor/Administrator of Orchestras with *Edgleys* and conducted the Rudolph Nureyev 1991 Australian tour and the 1992 Stars of the Bolshoi Ballet tour.

I worked with a couple of times on my return from England. It was a group of freelancers from Melbourne. They picked up the tail end of what was going on in live performance for orchestras, although most of it had died.

Trust Entrepreneurial Projects

In July 1986, other developments for the Trust included the opening of the *Halfix* booth in Martin Place, Sydney. José Calarco ran what became a very successful venture. It no longer exists but it gave access to performing arts events at discount prices which had never been done in Australia. José's reports were always positive and he was selling tickets. *Lennon, the musical*, opened at Sydney's Enmore Theatre in October 1986. There was also *Las Vegas on Ice* and *Sugar Babies*.

These were Kathleen Norris's projects; her ideas which she negotiated mostly in America. She often asked my view on orchestral resources but I was not close to the actual running of events. I saw rehearsals of *Lennon* and thought she made some fundamentally bad decisions as to where and when to put such shows on and how much money to budget. She exceeded what could have been considered realistic budgets and put the Trust at great risk. They were glitzy Disney type shows and not what the Trust had been associated with in the past nor probably should have been involved with. This was the forte of *Edgleys*, Pat Condon or Cameron Mackintosh¹⁵ if they thought shows were worthy.

Kathleen's view of what the Trust should do was at odds with its previous role. The entrepreneurial department had been successfully 'commercial' for years. Comparing *Lennon* with Count Basie: even though a different genre of music, Basie was a substantial show with orchestra, a fabulous show. It had all the panache and style one would expect of a Trust production. *Sugar Babies* and *Las Vegas on Ice* were like going to the fair at the weekend. I think they were unsuitable productions and the imprimatur of the Trust probably did not help ticket sales because it was the wrong market. I do not think the 10,000 members rallied to these. The decision to proceed should have been after proper investigation into the Trust members' market. I had my own problems but was aware of tension in the air. One of Kathleen's objectives was to go outside the traditional Trust market and build new ones. So *Lennon*, and especially *Sugar Babies* and *Las Vegas on Ice*, would appeal to the people who want to see shows in clubs and are prepared to pay for that environment. Perhaps she was looking to cross-fertilize, bring that market and maybe introduce them to ballet or opera. Kathleen, a Canadian, was influenced by the North American entertainment scene, which succeeds because they have a much bigger audience. She misjudged the Australian market completely.



Garry McDonald as 'Mo' in *Sugar Babies*—Don McMurdo 1987.

¹⁵ Sir Cameron Mackintosh (b.1946), British theatrical producer and theatre owner. Notable for his association with many commercially successful musicals including *Les Miserables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Mary Poppins*, *Miss Saigon* and *Cats*.

So, her attention was elsewhere. She wanted to pass the whole thing over, this Pandora's Box, for me to deal with.

Pre-Orchestral Transfer

By mid-1986, we had passed the point where *The Tribe Report* could be contested and we could find a way to keep the orchestras. Melbourne had demonstrated there was a way forward that would probably work and most people, musicians, new management, union and even the Trust in some ways, were on side with that. There was no reason why the Sydney Orchestra could not reach that point, which it was a long way from, if it was properly managed and we dealt with the issues. I wanted to concentrate on building the orchestra's profile and help with the infrastructure it needed. The issues of extra players, rostering and advance notice of scheduling from the user companies, needed to be addressed and consolidated in an industrial award which gave protection when these things were not upheld. We had to address the issue of standards, the right to dismiss and the conditions under which that would happen. The Musicians' Union had finally come to the understanding that you have to replace people sometimes. They started to waive their objection to overseas players coming in when there was no local available. It was always a thorny question but things were going in the right direction.

I was instructed to prepare for the transfers but firstly to get the managements to a point where they were respectable and represented the Trust as a good manager. I was given freedom to make some decisions. There would be an industrial issue for the transfers: we were dealing with people's lives and income. I wanted to be involved in the process, especially as there were some negotiations on the ground that Bill Parlour would not be involved in. I had a clear brief to get management functioning properly and if I saw a way to prevent one of the transfers, I should not hinder it but seek to change the minds of all involved. That was more likely with the Sydney Orchestra than Melbourne. There was confusion amongst Sydney players about who should manage them. It became clear the Opera Company wanted to manage the orchestra, which half the players did not want, so there was enough to suspend action until another management model was found. This did not happen, but it was why the Melbourne Orchestra transfer went ahead before Sydney. I proceeded industrially on the basis they were both going to transfer. We knew the Melbourne Orchestra was almost 99.9% likely to transfer to the Victorian Arts Centre Trust.

The Sydney Orchestra had a big question mark over it, but would probably transfer. Industrial conditions and conditions of employment had to be settled for both orchestras with the authority of the Industrial Commission. At the end of the day that meant a new award, which was the best thing we did for the Trust Orchestras because in the first years of my tenure there

were all manner of notions about what would happen when an orchestra transferred from the Trust. An opera conductor wanted to let them go and start again. This was a way to solve some of the problems of inadequate performance from some players. By and large, the orchestra played well, but occasionally there was a glitch, hence the view to start again. One of the orchestra leaders wanted everyone to re-audition and not be appointed unless they were at a certain standard. That was ridiculous; these were players who had been there a long time, many of them founder members and due long service leave. Morally it would have been wrong, and from a good management point of view, to get good quality playing, you need to have them on side by standing by them.

I believed the entitlements given by the Trust must transfer with players. What happens afterwards is up to the new management, the Industrial Commission and the players. That had not been discussed and there were rumours flying around about losing entitlements. No-one could say yes or no, except the union would fight those issues, but fighting it is not the answer. By then the negotiations with the orchestra and the **Victorian Arts Centre Trust** (VACT) were well advanced. We were liaising with John Bates, VACT industrial officer; a good negotiator, and an even better listener. Strong, but flexible, he was a very effective person in the industrial forum. He was well-known and respected by the Commission with a reputation for being fair and standing his ground. He and Bill Parlour, who represented the **Theatre Proprietors' Association**¹⁶, were quite a formidable team. Bill gave me advice when I asked. John and I decided to work together for both orchestras, not just Melbourne, and that was where his flexibility really came in. We started negotiations with the Musicians' Union Federal Secretary and copied those negotiations to the Sydney secretary, Alan Nash, who was talking with the Sydney Orchestra. We came to a common agreement that on transfer no-one would lose their job. We felt if we could have such an understanding between union and employers, we could take that to the Commission for endorsement since there was no conflict.

It took time because there were views that we could improve things or could do things differently. John and I agreed to stick to this. At the time, the dismissal process for musicians was not covered by an industrial agreement which was the big problem. They were working under the *Musicians' General Award*. There was a dispute resolution clause but it would not have covered the intricacies of a permanent employee in an Opera Ballet Orchestra. The dismissal process generally had been left to Bill Reid to decide, after informal discussion with the leader and section leader and maybe the union representative. Very few people were dismissed and when they were, it was a summary dismissal on grounds of something like drunkenness or assault, not musical incompetence.

¹⁶ Theatre Proprietors and Entrepreneurs Association created in 1976. Peak industry body until 1989, now called Live Performance Australia, based in Melbourne. <https://liveperformance.com.au>

Preparing the New *Opera and Ballet Award*

The end result was that we won the right to prepare a new award, which is quite unusual, and we did it working with the Musicians' Union representatives, mostly in Melbourne. We spent hours writing a completely new *Opera Ballet Award*. To get it endorsed, it had to go before a full bench of the Industrial Commission. Fortunately, this was in the days of the *Prices and Incomes Accord*¹⁷. The government philosophy under the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, was to be in accord with employers and to negotiate terms, then have it consolidated by the Commission. To our amazement, and with a great sense of achievement, everything was approved without alteration. We walked away with a new award which still stands, with some modifications. With this, we were guaranteed no-one would be affected adversely by the transfers.

As part of the transfer process, Don Grace prepared a form letter asking the Melbourne Orchestra musicians to resign by 31st July 1986, effective from 31st December 1986, so they could be employed by the Victorian management on 1st January 1987 without any loss of entitlements, benefits or superannuation. In August, the Musicians' Union objected to the letter being distributed unless accompanied by a letter from VACT offering re-employment. For its part, the VACT was not prepared to give that guarantee until it received a guarantee of adequate funding from the Australia Council; an impasse while VACT reassessed its financial package. The Australia Council was determined the change should go ahead but not prepared to offer additional financial assistance.

The Trust Board agreed if all else failed it would continue to manage the Melbourne Orchestra at this crucial point. We were a bit like the meat in the sandwich. To make the transfer effective, the Trust had to accept resignations to prevent redundancies. These had to be linked with the time and date of new employment so entitlements were not affected. We put into the award that on transfer, entitlements were maintained so if a player resigned, long service leave finished then. When it came down to the nitty-gritty of what transferring really meant, no-one had thought about this, including the Australia Council and the user companies. According to industrial law in Australia, once you have finished your employment, entitlements finish. There had to be a special arrangement with the Commission which became part of the award negotiation. We succeeded in all of those problems. What remained was for the Australia Council to release the purse; a problem for VACT. We could do nothing about that but were ready to undertake continued management. However, the Melbourne musicians, although a majority had voted to transfer, all agreed if that fell through, they wanted to continue with the Trust and thanked me for that offer.

The agreement the Trust had with the VACT was probably enough to put pressure, along with union and award conditions, on the Australia Council to guarantee the money. We had no

¹⁷ *The Prices and Incomes Accord* in 1983 was an agreement between the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Labor Party Government whereby unions agreed to restrict wage demands and the government pledged to minimize inflation.

further involvement on the money side but it did go smoothly at the end of the day. Until people sign on the dotted line, particularly in industrial issues, no matter what you say can be changed and if you get the wrong people you do not know it is going to change until you get before the Commission and then suddenly it comes out left of field. This was the strength of John Bates: his word was trusted. It was hard to get him to give his word – he would often say, ‘I have a problem with that. I cannot agree to that now. There is a problem, nothing to do directly with it but something associated’, and that would send us into another two months of negotiation. When he finally said ‘Yes’, the union was always happy. If we agreed with him then the union was happy because we were the only employers. In fact, the only respondent was the Trust, so from a legal point of view it was the Trust who had all the say. John had no right to go into the Commission unless we gave him that right because he was not a respondent to the award as they did not have employees. The ball was in our court and if we had positive outcomes acceptable to the Commission, then we had an agreement.

There were many issues, little hiccoughs, toward the transfer, so the process took time. Once we came to the understanding we were transferring, it happened. Whatever stood in the way we had to remove and as long as the union saw consolidation they could not do anything about it.

Sydney Opera House Trust

In July 1986 the Sydney Opera House Trust met with the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra Committee to consider the possibility of taking over the management of the orchestra. There was also a meeting arranged between the orchestra and Dr Richard Letts¹⁸, Director of the Music Board, Australia Council. The Trust had not been informed, I found out by chance. The Opera House might have been a good manager but the idea did not go further. At this time the transfer of the Melbourne Orchestra was well advanced and *The Tribe Report* had recommended the Sydney Orchestra transfer to the Australian Opera. While some players were keen, one of the big problems with the opera was over-rehearsing and punishing schedules. For example, on the same day as an opening night of a Verdi work, the orchestra rehearsed another work, followed by another opening night with rehearsals for another work in the repertoire during the day. Four works in two days was difficult. The orchestra was not malicious, it really tried, but this was unreasonable. The new award clarified rehearsal and opening night arrangements to limit this in the future. The Opera Company appeared to have no conscience about such schedules or delivering them at the eleventh hour, always with excuses such as conductors being delayed overseas. Possibly these were legitimate reasons, but *The Tribe Report* noted the orchestra had no room to negotiate.

¹⁸ Dr Richard Letts, AM, born Sydney 1935, is founder and Director of the Music Trust, founder and former Executive Director of the Music Council of Australia and Past President of the International Music Council. <http://musictrust.com.au/>

The musicians were not convinced things would change and knew the opera was against rostering. The Opera Company required one player continuously in the chair, so the first trumpet must always be present. That is possible with a symphony orchestra but working conditions in a pit are different, added to the pressures of an opera season; rehearsing and playing for weeks on end. As a principal you have pressure from the conductor, your peers and touring schedules. You need relief. There is a good argument for rostering but the opera was not prepared to listen and there was no forum to discuss it. The players could see the Melbourne transfer going ahead with an independent management in VACT. Perhaps they thought the Sydney Opera House Trust could do the same. The shame of that issue is they did not feel they could come to the Trust management and discuss the notion of a transfer to the Opera House.

There was little faith in the Trust, they believed they were on their own. At the same time the Trust was not happy when musicians went directly to the Australia Council over issues. I made recommendations to the Sydney Opera House Trust to improve the Opera Theatre pit. I had come up with some acoustic views arising from experience in the studio industry and underpinned with objective approaches, including having them checked by an authorized acoustician appointed by the Opera House. Without my knowledge, whilst I was advocating this, challenging enough in itself, the orchestra I represented sent a letter negating some of the things I was saying. They may have known better but never took the opportunity to put these on the table and discuss them with the view of presenting a united approach. That kind of responsible management was not achievable with the Sydney group. The Melbourne group facilitated success with the award because we did it together.

By October 1986, the Trust's response to the transfer of the orchestras, as recommended in *The Tribe Report*, was back in the Australia Council's court to work out the process. The Trust had no response from the Australia Council by December 1986 and I arranged a meeting with Richard Letts to ascertain the situation, particularly for planning and scheduling for 1987. He was very committed and believed in the transfer for musical reasons, which I respected, although I disagreed. He may not have understood what was going on in the minds of 120 odd players in Melbourne and Sydney or the reality of the way the user companies provided information to the orchestras. One reason for requesting a meeting was to air the issues of programming and advance scheduling.

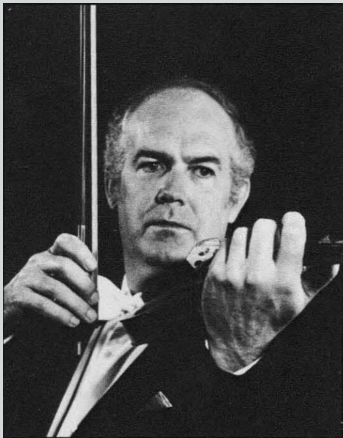
When I arrived at the Trust in early 1986, I was horrified to find the Ballet Company had not given us repertoire or rehearsal dates for the year. It was February and they had a mid-year season in Sydney. Usually the ballet came in a week or two before the opera finished and there would be a double-up. The issue was to make sure we did not go over the call quota, otherwise players would be in overtime whilst rehearsing a ballet or clashing with opera calls. Three call days were just not possible. We needed information and it was not forthcoming.

The Opera Company was better at advising next year's repertoire, but that was about as much as you got; rehearsal times and with whom was not forthcoming until the eleventh hour. There was no reason, as both companies had to plan well in advance to get soloists; they had to book ahead two years' minimum, maybe three or four, to get some singers and dancers, which meant they had planned the program. They also knew, if they were doing *Der Rosenkavalier* with Edward Downes, he would want at least ten rehearsals. They would be budgeting ten to fifteen rehearsals, depending on the conductor and his availability. That would have helped. I met Noel Pelly¹⁹, the Ballet administrator after Peter Bahen, and David Agler, principal conductor for the Opera. Both were understanding and genuinely concerned. Noel gave me assurance they would look into advance scheduling and give at least one year's notice but did not know when this could happen. David Agler argued they needed flexibility because of last minute cast and other changes. I understood, but advance notice was integral to the success of the orchestras' annual planning. In the end he agreed it could be done. I almost had acceptance that we would get notice but no direction. I considered the Australia Council needed to be aware of the issue and look at grant conditions.

After more discussion with David and Noel they agreed. By the end of 1986 I had next year's schedule in advance for the first time ever! That was a mark that went on the wall. We were able to plan properly and for the first time could address the issue of rostering, previously affected by schedule changes. Players would make plans on the schedule to be away and could not be blamed for schedule changes. We had to be dealing fairly if we were to ask for these things, so for the first time we were in a position to insist on having rostering established in advance and having it adhered to, subject to illness. In terms of willing to work and willing not to work, we could get that out in the open and take it to the user company informally. I would advise a certain player would be unavailable and check if this presented problems. We no longer had to face criticism, such as Dame Peggy van Praagh's oboe player issue, and had the opportunity to deal with objections on both sides in advance. For the first time we were in a position to manage, a great step forward.

Ronald Thomas, Artistic Director, Sydney Orchestra

Ronald Thomas was appointed artistic director of the Sydney Orchestra effective from November 20th 1986. Finding a way to solve the absence of artistic direction had been on my list for some time. It was very difficult because the profile of the job was not high. This is not to blame the orchestra, but its status in the community was virtually nil and we tried to improve that with concerts. Early on, I knew what we were looking for but had to be realistic. You could not expect



Ronald Thomas

¹⁹ Noel Pelly (1926-2003), Arts Administrator, trained as a lawyer. His association with the Australian Ballet spanned the company's first 40 years—as publicist with the AETT in 1961, then with the company from 1966, administrator from 1983 to 1991 and Board member 1995 to 2000.

someone like Sir Charles Mackerras²⁰ to take the job with his other international commitments. He was the kind of person needed but was out of our league. I knew the artistic director must have a high profile in the Australian and international music scene, be a non-opera conductor to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain the impartiality of our management of the orchestra. The Trust management would have to negotiate for its artistic director to conduct an opera occasionally as director of the orchestra, not the opera. The artistic director's conditions of employment must have a clause preventing him from negotiating employment with user companies. To achieve the high profile necessary, he must maintain his involvement as an active artist and his hours of work with the Trust must be structured accordingly to allow this. Ronald was a major, recognized, musician/soloist, experienced in leading orchestras. The job had been sitting on the books for a long time but no-one had come forward. I approached him and he accepted. I thought someone like Ron would not get bored or disengaged like Bill Reid had become because he did not have the hands-on opportunity to work with them. Ronald had other interests which kept him going musically but he was available. We wanted guidance. His experience of guiding musicians through problems and developing high standards, would be useful. I had experienced him as a leader and how he brought rehearsals together to a very high standard, with his techniques of playing and musical communication.

Although when Ronald was appointed there were press articles about attempts to get the orchestra out of the pit and the problems of the Opera House pit, Andrew McKinnon, the Trust's publicist, was realistic about what would interest the media. Without a profile, the orchestra story was difficult to 'sell'. The media needed special hounding for which we had no resources, so brochures were the main method of promotion. Ronald was a high-profile international soloist coming into a job *The Tribe Report* had made public. So that was a story of interest but there was nothing contentious about the orchestra's concerts. I found it very difficult to get any profile for the orchestra in the public domain. The orchestra took umbrage at my appointment of Ronald, rejecting it on July 23rd 1987 at a meeting with myself and Kathleen Norris. They listed concerns critical of just about everything he was trying to do, including, 'The ballet music for *Swan Lake* was seen as a major let-down of the orchestra in that Mr Thomas had promised more readable music parts. [He] had failed to follow through and advise the orchestra of a result.' It was really quite small stuff but for them it was important because they had a lot of trouble with the quality of music from the Ballet Company and it was the artistic director's role to seek good, workable, parts. 'Mr Thomas had not upgraded the standard of dress as he had undertaken to do.' An artistic director had to deal with that by talking about visual image matching musical image. 'The expected outside concerts have not eventuated nor had there been any feedback.'

20 Sir Charles Mackerras, AC, CH, CBE (1925-2010), Australian conductor, authority on operas of Janacek and Mozart and Gilbert & Sullivan. Was the first Australian chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and had long associations with English National Opera and Welsh National Opera.

Ronald was not a good communicator with the orchestra but they were prepared to be scathingly critical without any discussion. It was *fait accompli* as far as they were concerned. They considered he was unavailable because he was too busy with the Sydney String Quartet. They thought they should have someone available whenever they needed him. They also did not understand the user companies not wanting anyone to control the orchestras. The Opera Company was on record saying they had their own musical director who would influence the orchestra, which meant if a decision arose favouring the orchestra in a concert rather than favouring the Opera in an opera, it was certainly going to go opera's way and the whole notion of building orchestra confidence in public and giving opportunities outside opera would disappear. These were constant issues of concern. I wished they had brought the issues to the table long before.

We had to let Ronald go after this vote of no confidence. There was no point in trying to dissuade them because I was flying in the face of *The Tribe Report* and the Opera's situation where they did not want an independent and they were the major user and influence. The Ballet appeared not to care as long as there was an orchestra in the pit but the Opera wanted to mould it to the sound they were comfortable with. I was facing a long negotiation with the Musicians' Union to improve conditions and to strengthen our management position so if the orchestra transferred, it would do so with strong management in place. There were other more important things and we had been without a music director for ten years. It was not a desirable thing to do but it was not high on the agenda. If the orchestra had not have been transferring, the most important thing would have been to find a satisfactory musical director.

Much time had been spent on cleaning up the management and we had achieved most of that by the end of 1986. We had a line of reporting, open communication with everyone, and had achieved most of Tribe's recommendations. We had come to the view that the deciding factor for future stability would rest on the industrial agreement. The VACT had been advocating all along that we must address the industrial issues on transfer. There was no question of a new award at that stage. It had been evolving but there had been many discussions in Victoria about conditions in the award, all related to things like rostering and entitlements; what could be consolidated as a right, dismissal for inappropriate playing, too many calls, access to communication with the user companies, scheduling. If put into an award, they would be binding and contractual. We had willing people prepared to agree to reasonable conditions in the Ballet and Opera, but were concerned as to the future if those people changed and others decided to act differently. There was also the aspect of transferring rights and making sure they were protected by industrial agreement because we had to dismiss them on 31st December and the Victorian Arts Centre Trust had to employ them on 1st January, but there were issues. We addressed these on an

industrial level and had agreements with the union but it had not reached the Commission or come into the awards as yet. There were still the logistics of getting it into the award and VACT realized this was going to take some time.

We did not finish the award for another eighteen months. So the focus for me was industrial issues and progressing the award. I wanted to involve Sydney musicians in discussions but they were not forthcoming or very interested. We had some meetings in Melbourne where the Sydney representative began to see how far we had gone with these issues, similar to those the Sydney Orchestra would have to address and be concerned about. While they began to see what was necessary, I was working in isolation from the orchestra.

The Melbourne Orchestra Becomes the State Orchestra of Victoria

The Melbourne Orchestra transfer was completed by the end of 1986 and from January 1st 1987 they were managed by VACT. The orchestra was renamed the State Orchestra of Victoria. Right up until the time of transfer many little things had not been discussed. The big things were in place: the award was underway, also where they would go, but there were many imagined issues and fears about the new management's expectations including touring. Many were personal worries, so when they had the opportunity to talk in confidence to the administrator one-on-one, things came out that would never have emerged through the committee. It was necessary to reassure the players and when they were all wrapped up and finished, it was an orchestra that felt it had control of its future and players knew where they were going. It made the transfer of the Melbourne Orchestra much smoother than in Sydney. Right up until the end there was a strong anti-Trust campaign from the Sydney Orchestra. The Melbourne Orchestra was the opposite. At the eleventh hour of transfer, the Melbourne Orchestra got together and thanked the Trust for all they had done and wished the Trust well. They were genuinely thankful but that did not happen in Sydney.

At the same time, the Trust was resisting the handing over of the Sydney Orchestra to a user. One of the issues it felt important was to do with the possible enlargement of the Opera Theatre pit. The orchestra was on holiday, with rehearsals commencing on 29th December 1986 for the summer season of opera. There were five players on sick leave with stress related illnesses, a big issue. There was also an increasing problem necessitating an investigation by the management into the question of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI). By the end of 1986 the Trust had experienced a disastrous trading year, losing nearly \$2 million (all its assets) and there was a general downturn in box office sales. The Trust was only receiving a small fraction of its revenue, 7%, from state and federal governments because the orchestras were supported separately through earmarked funds. The Australia Council had put constraints and conditions on the Trust to ensure grants were

used specifically for the orchestras. Although the orchestras' grant was not always adequate, it was not threatened. Transfer did not threaten the grant; it would go with whoever was managing.

In January 1987, the Russian violinist, George Ermolenko, who had sought asylum in Australia in the mid-1970s, was appointed Sydney Orchestra concertmaster. There had been trouble filling that position, and others, for some time. There was a mixed reception to Ermolenko and one could never quite work out whether they were personal or artistic or probably both. He enjoyed massive support from some members and complete opposition from others. He functioned well as a leader and player, but his communication may have been a problem. This was probably an artistic issue and I was careful not to go down any artistic paths and give opinions. I did not get involved in artistic decisions. I chaired the audition panel but had no voting right. I had my hands full with growing health problems faced by the musicians and in early 1987 a health and safety officer was elected by the orchestra.

Sydney Opera House Conditions/RSI

There were concerns including the Opera House air-conditioning and Opera Theatre pit. I met with the Sydney Opera House, Opera Australia and the Trust to initiate an in-depth investigation into the general working environment, undertaken by the Occupational Health Department of the Royal South Sydney Hospital. There was a hearing study as well. Band aid attempts to make the pit manageable and useable were creating more problems than they were solving. The orchestra began putting screens in front of instruments and whilst that might be comfortable for the person sitting in front of a trombone player, the trombonist playing into that screen was getting a first reflection back at loud volume and high sound pressure level. The potential for damaging ears over a long period, even though it would not be noticeable in the short term, was quite high. This was a problem to be addressed and nipped in the bud. I had discussed issues informally with some auditory experts and wanted the musicians to run tests with them so they could understand what acoustic adjustments might be made to the pit. The musicians were complaining about chairs they were sitting on and back problems, and there were Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) developing.

No matter how good a player you are, you can be affected by stress if you are not sitting properly. Maurice Stead and Gordon Bennett, two leaders, had serious RSI problems. Gordon was under a workers' compensation guidance program and we had worked out a program of taking him off seasons completely so he could return when a strong leader was needed. He was still able to play but had to be carefully used. Maurice Stead had RSI late in his career with the Melbourne Orchestra. It had become worse and although he was no longer playing with the Trust, it affected him and he needed to seek compensation under the *Workers' Compensation Act*. It took many

years to go through the court with test after test but that was the first that came to mind and I had concern for him. It was clear there was a growing RSI problem which would get out of control and affect the orchestra in the long term if we did not take steps. It is always difficult to distinguish what is a genuine claim, because some people believe they have RSI but it is just strain, and with rest will be okay, but we had to go through the process of finding out, not ignoring it and dealing with it. In those days industrial health was not the issue it became. The other thing was the ergonomics of the seats. It was clear we had to do something about the seats people sat on for long periods of time. Bad enough acoustically in the pit but if seats caused problems in the lower back, there will be problems, which was partly Gordon's RSI problem. His lower back caused RSI in the arm and shoulder. All of those things are solvable if the right steps are taken, and given the respite



The Carl Pini Quartet—Carl Pini, Gordon Bennett, Barbara Wooley and John Gould.

needed, but we had to have a policy. It had to be administered by someone artistic who could say a player could not play anymore because their playing was affecting the music. That is an artistic decision to follow up on a medical decision. We did not have anyone to take that position.

Also important was rostering, at a time where it could be used to give respite to people suffering from RSI, other injuries or serious ailments like seating postures. The other issue was not enough available extra and casual players to provide relief to those who needed it or to bring the orchestral establishment up to a requirement to satisfy opera, maintain and improve standards. The bottom line was money. You could not attract players of higher calibre without offering good fees, so there needed to be efforts made to do that. This was not the orchestra's job and the Australia Council was not funding the Trust to do it. As far as changing the pit itself, that has been a constant issue since the Opera House opened and was not something the orchestra management could do anything about. The Opera House had taken it on notice and was attempting to do something. By the end of 1987 we succeeded in communicating effectively with the Opera House so the matter was clearly on the table.

Trust Industrial Relations Officer

In 1986, concurrently with my role as Administrator of the orchestras, I became the Trust Industrial Relations Officer with responsibility for the negotiation and maintenance of three federal industrial awards covering Trust employees. This began with the orchestras. Once I had talked with John Bates and understood our legal position, Kathleen wanted us to take the upper hand in these negotiations. She considered I should look after industrial relations for everything, so suddenly my job description grew. It mostly related to the musicians with a few matters related to theatre stage crews. We did not have many employees and Bill Parlour was involved as the Trust's industrial representative. There was not much to do except for the musicians with whom I was already negotiating the transfer and I had my finger on the pulse of what was needed.

It was a difficult time personally. My marriage to Carole McPhee had ended and I was disappointed with this circumstance, but one cannot point any blame: both sides are involved when a marriage disintegrates. It is a unit but it did not work as such. I was upset, particularly since I had such respect for the person professionally. My mother had died in the early 1980s, affecting how I viewed the future. I was moving through a phase of not playing, which was also a problem. I had come back from a very vibrant musical activity and slowly like a wedge it had diminished until I went to the Trust and was not playing at all. I got a job playing on Friday/Saturday nights at Manly Leagues' Club for about a year during those first few years at the Trust. It took my mind off work issues and did not impinge on the job hours. But it was a reminder that if I stopped playing I would lose something important since there was no person in my life to focus my personal activity. My solution was to work more hours.

There was plenty of work to do rather than going home to an empty house. It was a constant reminder that I was not playing anymore and was unlikely to play again. That problem remained until I started legal studies, which came about because I needed to make life more interesting and perhaps change direction. I felt I was doing a good job—only history will tell—but it was gruelling and no-one thanks you at the end of the day. All the people in Melbourne were grateful for what I managed to do. In Sydney there was only one person in the entire orchestra who sent me a thank you note for the work done on the award and guaranteeing continuation of employment; one out of sixty-seven people. We fixed those problems and the management, and at the time of transfer both Melbourne and Sydney had very efficient managements. Although the new people in Sydney did not keep that management, it was there and the orchestra transferred with a schedule in advance; they had rostering under control and both the Opera and the orchestra were happy with the rostering outcome. We had achieved a lot but there was flack all the time, particularly from the orchestra, criticizing the Trust management, meaning me, over silly things not properly thought through. I never responded; I took the view it was not worth

arguing about and would not descend to that level. At the end of the day, after nearly four years, I wanted to say 'enough.' I do not mind thinking about it now because I have mellowed a bit.

The Sydney Orchestra

In January 1987 the Sydney Orchestra came back from holidays, met and voted to support the Trust as its future manager. The vote was forty-one to the Trust, transfer to the Opera Company fifteen and eight informal votes or abstentions. The orchestra wrote to Richard Letts asking the Australia Council to recognize its feeling on the matter of transfer given that the Musicians' Union and the Australian Ballet supported this view and morale was generally good. We were waiting for the Australia Council's next move. The Trust Board was concerned with the financial consequences of losing the Sydney Orchestra. No-one wanted it to go, particularly because it was the basis of Australia Council funding to the Trust. I had no communication with the directors, only attending one or two board meetings at the CEO's request to observe and clarify issues needing some expert view. I was aware of the problem the Trust was facing if the Sydney Orchestra transferred and the problem fiscally of effecting that transfer. There were cash flow problems and the need to have clarification well in advance of the next year's commitment. The Australia Council only ever gave us about three months' notice for the following year. That was a real problem, almost as bad as the user companies not supplying annual schedules.

There were still many matters up in the air needing to be resolved as the Melbourne Orchestra settled in with its new management. The Sydney Orchestra objected quite vocally to the possibility of transferring to the Opera Company. The Australian Ballet felt it would threaten access to the orchestra and even those musicians who wanted to be governed by the Opera, still feared the company would take advantage with over-rehearsing and poor scheduling, affecting their rostering right which was being examined and put on an equitable basis. While there was some progress through the Trust, I think the musicians still wanted to go to another entity. Financially that posed a problem as the Trust had bankrolled a shortfall of about \$70,000, never recouped from the Australia Council. The Trust had solved this initial shortfall problem by retrenching a couple of positions; subsequently reinstated when more money came from the Australia Council. There was a surplus the Trust had built up for contingencies and there was a question mark on how that would be spent or disbursed to the new managers, if at all. These were the issues occupying the Chief Executive Officer and Directors, substantial enough, considering the financial position of the Trust following the CEO initiated entrepreneurial activities which had failed. There were serious financial concerns which I was not directly involved in, although they would impact on effective transfer.

Financial Pressures

The Trust had developed an association with the Chalwin Estate, having presented concerts at Vivian Chalwin's house at Beauty Point on Sydney Harbour in the late 1960s. Chalwin, a great music lover, died in 1980, leaving an unworkable will, which promised money to the Trust to continue musical initiatives he had started. It was to prove a complicated and long-winded saga. The Trust was dealing also with tax deductible donations for arts organizations with changes in relation to the Income Tax Assessment Act.

The Trust had financial difficulty, struggling with the failure of *Lennon*, which lost over \$1 million in a single week. In March 1987, the Trust resolved to sell the Dowling Street property. There was a lot of press coverage about the Trust having a bad time. I put out a notice to the Sydney Orchestra on 1st May 1987 following Bob Evans' article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on the financial affairs of the Trust. It was widely known that 1986 was an unsuccessful year but I wanted to assure the musicians that the Trust was strong and viable, and past disappointments should not prevent us going forward optimistically. I wanted to encourage, thank them and get through without panic, especially to ensure we did not lose good players. There will always be speculative and subjective views that take over and become real, a bit like Chinese whispers. An orchestra without clear direction or access to proper information is prone to that. Things have changed now with the improvement in communication through electronic access. I hoped to help them understand their future was not in jeopardy but this was difficult without an artistic policy and director. I could not take on that role but wanted to reduce uncertainty which would impact on the work. In May 1987, the Australia Council advised the Sydney Orchestra could stay with the Trust, having dropped the idea of it transferring. A review period of three years was proposed, with the requirement of six monthly reports on progress. The reality was that the Trust had responded to the Tribe recommendations. We analyzed whether the Trust would contest the findings and decided against it. It was not worth causing more turmoil, so we were working toward a successful outcome. I doubt the Australia Council could have done anything but support our moving in the right direction, maybe not what everyone wanted but a good direction to be moving in. We managed to improve our relationship with the Sydney Orchestra. There had been attempts at better communication and while people were a bit slow

the australian elizabethan theatre trust

(Incorporated in A.C.T.)

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NOTICE

ELIZABETHAN SYDNEY ORCHESTRA

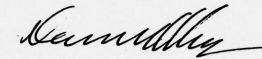
By now you may have seen an article in the Sydney Morning Herald by Bob Evans on the financial affairs of the Trust. It is a widely known fact that 1986 was not a successful year for some of the Trust's activities, however the Trust in total is an extremely strong and viable organisation and past disappointments do not prevent us going into the future with optimistic expectations.

Kathleen will be releasing an official statement to the press next week on the results of our last year's activities. A copy of this press release will be sent to you before it reaches the papers.

Every business has its good and bad times, and the Trust is no exception to this rule, however the ability to succeed is found in the strength of Directors, Management and Staff. In this sense the Trust is in an extremely strong position and is currently moving on into new directions as well as consolidating in current activities.

I am optimistic for the Trust's future and look forward to the continued development of the Orchestra.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the work you have done in this current ballet season. As you are aware, the Ballet Foundation has been very impressed with the standards of the Orchestra, and it has been pleasing to receive specific favourable comments from various members of the Ballet Management and music staff.



Warwick D. Ross,
Administrator of Orchestras

1st May, 1987.

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to take it up, the mechanism was there, and it was only a matter of time and perseverance before we got to a point where the orchestra would transfer to whatever manager it was going to have. There were still problems that abounded outside of transfer and the next task was to stabilize the Sydney Orchestra and work out its artistic directorship.

There was a successful Opera House *Mostly Mozart* concert on 5th January 1987 before the summer opera season, and performances in the Domain and Parramatta Park as I began to try to find supplementary sources of income. There were already problems of workload but these sources of income would be events outside the pit in a different environment, so might be psychologically acceptable. We had some rostering capacity so it seemed possible for players to come out of the orchestra without affecting user companies' needs and make a little bit of extra money. *The Melba* recordings provided extra money and soon after we achieved wage parity. So we started to rectify financial disadvantage for players. Having extra work meant I could attract people like Robert Ingram and others to work alongside Trust musicians and develop understanding and awareness of players in the field who could join the Trust Orchestra on a casual basis when need arose. There were plenty of good musicians available but they needed constant work to stop them disappearing overseas or to other states in search of work. Anyone, if they did not have a family and roots in Sydney, would go to an area where there was more work. I did not want some of those players to go, so I set up Australian Orchestral Enterprises, which had nothing to do with the Sydney or Melbourne Orchestras, which would fund itself from a series of concerts. In 1987 we presented a substantial number of events; profitable financially, providing work for up to sixty musicians and some commercial musical activity to help the Trust.

David Helfgott at the Sydney Town Hall

Partly to celebrate the twentieth birthday of the Sydney Orchestra (which began on 8th May 1967), we presented a Sydney Town Hall concert on 25th May 1987 with a celebratory reception in the *Carvery* afterwards. Pianist David Helfgott²¹ was the soloist, John Hopkins, director of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, was the conductor. We needed something to really lift the Orchestra's game and public profile. The Town Hall was traditionally the main venue for concerts. I wanted to attract a new audience for the Orchestra. David Helfgott had given a fantastic solo recital at Scots College, Sydney, in 1986. Although always eccentric, having experienced early mental problems, he had recovered sufficiently in the mid-1980s and musically he had delivered a fantastic performance. I made contact with Gillian, his wife. This would be his first concert with an orchestra since his recovery. The Orchestra needed to be approached carefully. John Hopkins

21 David Helfgott (born 1947-), Australian concert pianist whose story inspired the film *Shine* starring Geoffrey Rush.
John Raymond Hopkins AM OBE (1927-2013), British born Australian conductor and administrator. Moved to Australia in 1963. Was Federal Director of Music, ABC, 1963-1973, Dean, School of Music, Victorian College of the Arts, 1973-1986 and Director of Sydney Conservatorium of Music, 1986-1991.



David Helfgott (*seated*) with Ronald Thomas, Artistic Director, Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra and John Hopkins, conductor.

had a very good reputation, deservedly so, with a wide repertoire and proven experience beginning with the BBC in England. He could learn something overnight and conduct it the next day, including ballet, opera, symphony, chamber music. Musicians will always make comments about conductors but John was well respected in the musical community. The issue was whether he and David could work together. Gillian, who was looking after David literally and physically, was great. David would focus briefly before running around accosting people in an affable way; just being David is the only way to describe it. Gillian kept him on track, so it seemed as though we could proceed. Wanting to show off David's capacities as well as giving the Orchestra



The Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, Conductor John Hopkins, Pianist David Helfgott in concert at the Sydney Town Hall 25 May 1987.

an enjoyable challenge, we suggested two popular and substantial piano works, one in each half. That way the audience would see two aspects of David. Tchaikovsky's *Concerto No.1* would be the substantial work, and David was very happy to play Rachmaninov's popular *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, although it was a huge workload. John suggested eight folk songs, written for orchestra, by Anatoly Lyadov. It became an all-Russian program and we did Glinka's Overture from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*.

Recording the Concert

This was a big opportunity for the orchestra. I felt they would rise to it if someone like John led and guided them properly. The energy David brings to the piano cannot be disputed. The moment he walks into the room, it is full

of energy. I had come across **Michael Stavrou**, a very unusual recording engineer, who planned the mixing techniques and oversaw the *Melba* series recording which I produced. For the studio recording, Yvonne Kenny, singing the role of Melba, was positioned high on a dais above the top of the Orchestra. Michael wanted a particular effect from her sound and did something quite amazing. He blew a sheet like a sail and put it behind her and then a mic in front of her so as to get the reflection from the sheet back into the same mic to enhance the sound. Mike was well known for doing such things, albeit somewhat eccentrically. We had an eccentric pianist, so why not an eccentric engineer to record this concert? I had my own equipment, a collection of historic microphones, including an old valve microphone which was the first microphone *Neumann* made. It is a U47 run off a valve system, designed and built for a big, wide orchestra.

With my microphones and Mike's flexibility and imagination, we had the capacity to make something quite different about this sound. The mic sat in the middle of the wind section; the only microphone we had there. We recorded everything; wind, brass, percussion, through that microphone. For the strings, we had clusters of KM84s, small diaphragm microphones for high end. We had little clusters of three, tied together with a bit of tape, slung over the top of the cello, violin and viola sections. That in itself was different, quite unique. Digital recording had just come

in; 1985 was the year Compact Discs first came out commercially. *Dire Straits* in England had released their first CD. This new process with fantastic sound coming from digital recordings had set the audio world on its heels. Mike Stavrou was on top of this: while everyone else was doing analogue, Mike did it with two F1s which were like VHS tapes used in early videos. They were recorded on that in digital format.

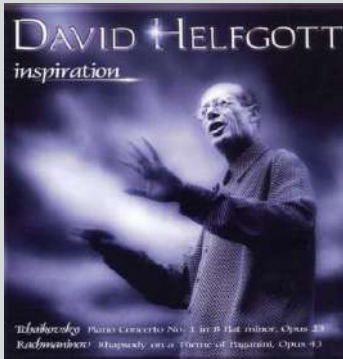
My aim was to make this recording experience different as a positive advance for the orchestra, as the Trust's first stereo recording in Australia by *Columbia of Lola Montez*²² had been in 1958. Here was another first and a great project for the orchestra if done well and promoted in the wider sphere. Mike had been in London and was a protégé of George Martin, the Beatles' producer. Martin started Air Studios in London and Mike was the house studio recordist for about ten years, recording every pop singer including Cilla Black. He was also the key engineer for an offshore studio. He specialized in recording orchestras with several award-winning recordings of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. He subsequently made a recording with Yvonne Kenny and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. He was more than just an eccentric engineer; he was experienced with orchestral sound and knew how to capture it. He was also innovative applying new technologies and invented a digital mixing console, a completely different concept to any other, and successful all over the world. As producer, I knew this would be a good relationship: Mike, the orchestra and David Helfgott. We used my microphones to give a unique sound. No-one had been using those sort of microphones for a long time; the ABC used them when they first came out. Everyone was moving into digital and there were pros and cons to this approach. In this particular instance one microphone, which recorded the majority of the orchestra, created a warm, beautiful sound which you do not get nowadays.

We did some minimum publicity through Andrew McKinnon. He had something to work on with David and got the message out to the media. He arranged for David to appear on television that day. I think it was Ray Martin's evening show at 6pm. The concert was at 8pm but David agreed (most performers would not), to appear on TV beforehand. He behaved as he normally behaves, catching the imagination of everyone watching. He played stunningly. We had sold the concert reasonably well and were looking for a healthy, maybe half full, house, the capacity being about 1900. We were not opening the section behind the orchestra or some of the upper stalls. At 7.45pm David was ready when front of house advised they could not get everyone in. There was a queue to buy tickets down to the Regent Theatre, a block away. They were selling tickets as fast as they could. Some latecomers had to sit behind the stage for this successful, sold-out concert, a great thing for the orchestra.

²² This is a link to a sound file, narrated by Antony Jeffrey, from a CD collection produced by Warwick Ross for the Trust's 50th anniversary in 2004. There are some details of the origins of the production of *Lola Montez* which was directed by George Carden, with Musical Direction by Leo Packer, together with the hit song, 'Be My Saturday Girl' sung by Eric Thornton and Jane Martin, from the original cast recording.



Immediately afterwards, we were 'breaking down' the audio material and doing post-production notes knowing Mike had captured a good recording. The aftermath was interesting: at the outset of rehearsals the orchestra was not altogether positive about this concert or convinced they should be working with someone like Helfgott. This was not the unanimous view but there were players who approached the concert lacking positivity. This was where John Hopkins did such a good job: when he got them playing at the final rehearsal, he made them committed to the music and some even said they had not thought it would be so good. Mike and I did post-editing on the tapes in the recording studio. David had missed some notes in three or four bars in the first movement of the Tchaikovsky, so he re-recorded these in Billy Hyde's studio in the basement of the Trust Dowling Street building. We mixed these into the original soundtrack so we could supplement the gaps of sound with these notes and it worked. We worked on this at *EMI's* mixing studios, running it time and time again to get the sequences right. It was a difficult edit, not so much of putting the notes in, but making them sound the same because he had played the concert on a *Bosendorfer* Imperial Grand, and we had done the overdub on a *Yamaha* seven foot grand. With Mike's skill with equalization he managed to make the sound of those two or three notes match what was there. Someone was walking by at *EMI* and stopped to listen. We told him who was playing and he advised that *Sony* Music would be very interested.



Fast Forward 20 Years!

Twenty years later, in about 1999, the Helfgotts asked if the Trust still had the tape as they wished to publicly release a recording of the concert. By this time, the Trust did not have an orchestra and had been dormant for about a decade. I rang the chairman, Lloyd Waddy, and advised that if the tapes could be found in storage, the Trust could sell the copyright to the Helfgotts. This was done for \$10,000; they were only interested in the two concerti (the rest we still have), and *Sony* produced and released a CD in London called *Inspiration* which marks Helfgott's return to the concert stage after his illness. Twenty years down the track, the Elizabethan Theatre Orchestra was enshrined in a very good recording.

The Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra

On 10th August 1987 the Trust Board agreed with the Orchestra Council's recommendation that the Sydney Orchestra be renamed the Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra effective from 5th November 1987, which coincided with an orchestral concert with Ronald Thomas in Brisbane. In September the orchestra advised the new name was not acceptable, all part of a breakdown in communication and lack of confidence in Ronald Thomas. At one of the moments when the

orchestra was free between opera and ballet, there was an opportunity to expose the orchestra to another audience. I talked to Diana Sharpe at the Opera House *Bennelong Program* for young people and offered the orchestra, conducted by Richard Gill²³, for a November 1987 *Babies' Prom*. It was tremendously successful. Young children sat on the floor with instruments spread out, very informal. Richard, in his usual manner, did a fine job communicating to that young age. It was a departure from standard work the musicians did in that same building every day, and for the first time they did not have to worry about the pit; we were out in one of the studios.

From this experience, I sought to develop an educational activity to give performances, locally and regionally, to schoolchildren in different age groups. We would present repertoire written for a children's audience such as Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Saint-Saëns' *The Carnival of the Animals*, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 20* (the *Elvira Madigan* Theme); pieces that were identifiable and they would understand, with the object of getting them interested in classical music. These works all required skilled players. Although there were discussions with the Department of Education and we sought potential venues, it never proceeded. Again, it was an attempt to try and find work.

By late 1987 we did not have to worry about user agreements and relationships. The VACT did a reasonably good job of solving problems to wider benefit because such precedents flowed on to help the solution in Sydney as well. With David Agler, principal conductor for the Opera, the attitude had begun to change. There was less confrontation between the management of the orchestra and the Opera Company. Advance scheduling, including making sure the rehearsal requirements were reasonable and realistically practical, were treated as serious matters. Russell Mitchell, the Opera Company administrator, and David, took a serious, committed interest and attitude to helping solve problems and seeking answers towards a position where we could all work together. With the transfer of Melbourne and the new management, we had another arm to assist us and as we were both saying the same things, it was logical the opera and ballet would start listening. Noel Pelly, at the Ballet, was very open to hearing about problems, especially with conductors, that had been articulated by both orchestras for years, sometimes justifiably so. Those matters were now on the table for discussion.

We started to get things addressed and found we could reach mutual understanding on industrial matters. We did not need to go to the Commission as the Opera and Ballet companies had no legal or formal say, but we always sought it and involved them in discussions, making sure they were comfortable with, or would accept the rationale for, anything we did. Things were discussed properly and widely, well worked through and put before the Industrial Commission in an acceptable way and within the guidelines with no surprises. 1987 was a year of consolidation.

Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra

Formed in 1967, the EPO (formerly the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra) has been a major force in Australian performing arts for twenty years and is involved in many significant musical events through its association with the Australian Opera and the Australian Ballet.

While involved predominantly with performances of the Opera and Ballet, the Trust, through Orchestra Administrator Warwick Ross, provides opportunities for the EPO to perform on the concert platform when schedules allow. The Orchestra has a very fine reputation for high performance standards and is involved in regular presentation of the Mostly Mozart series as well as concerts with top soloists and conductors. The Orchestra also performs at the enormously popular Opera in the Park concerts.

The Trust also manages two non-permanent ensembles which perform on special occasions during the year, The Soloists of Australia and The Elizabethan Sinfonietta. Performances include the highly successful *PORGY AND BESS*, the ballet *GISELLE* and the recent presentation of Croatian opera in concert form, *ZRINSKI*, at the Opera House.

This year the EPO will perform Dvorak's *Requiem* with the Philharmonia Society in Sydney and a concert featuring Georgio Ermolenko as soloist for Liverpool's bicentennial celebrations.

²³ Richard Gill AO (1941-2018), conductor, teacher, leading advocate of music education. Has received many awards in recognition of his contribution to Australian music, including the Don Banks Music Award 2006, a MOST Achievement Award 2018, and an Arts Leadership Award 2018.

Even though the Melbourne transfer was complete and we no longer had formal responsibility, we were still working hand in hand with the new management. In effect, we were doing the same things we had been doing the previous year, although the VACT was taking responsibility and making decisions. When it came to the working operation of the orchestra, the conditions and players were bound by the award which we were amending, a process which continued until 1989. Although discussions began in 1986 it was not until 1987 that there was major action through the Commission to get a \$30 increase under the Anomalies Conference to achieve a metal trades' catch-up and the rectification of the Australian Broadcasting parity shift. This was the first time we had opportunity to argue our case formally in the industrial forum and seek an outcome. We had consensus with the Musicians' Union. There was no real dispute, although there had to be a formal dispute to go before the Commission. Proceedings were slow and had to be formalized before the Commission. This was now all being run in Melbourne and involved a great deal of travelling for me.

Towards a New Award

John Bates would look at the existing Award, talk to the musicians and investigate their concerns. He would then contact me about what clauses merited changing. We began with meetings at the Victorian Arts Centre Trust, which initially I chaired until the Melbourne orchestra transferred. Subsequently, John chaired meetings and I was a guest along with two members from the Sydney Orchestra, who did not always turn up. There were several members of the Victorian Orchestra, a Victorian state government representative, an Australia Council delegate and either the union state or federal secretary or both. Around a big conference table issues were thrashed out right down to the nitty-gritty of rights that had been avoided or ignored or not brought in line with other similar rights in the ABC Orchestras. We had detailed conversations, generally finding a resolution. With agreement on issues, we would seek an amendment of the award. The union or John would create a dispute formally, a set of words to go into the award would be drafted. This needed care as we were in a difficult industrial situation.

It was a period of prices and wages accord where we could not exceed certain principles. We could only get movement if it fitted a guideline and then we could seek a hearing before a Commissioner; this process continued for three years. I addressed the Commission in October 1989 and remember my feelings of representing the orchestra rather than management. We had to ensure, on transfer to a new management, that employment entitlements remained; that musicians would not be disadvantaged because of a transfer. This was a critical issue. Most of the Sydney musicians were not aware of this although I knew at least one major opera conductor considered all the players should be let go. While not a serious possibility, it would have meant, at

the time of transfer, we would have given formal notice of finishing employment. Those people would lose entitlements and their job. It is irrelevant whether you think it was justified or not. The fact is they had an agreement enshrined in a legal document and covered by an award accepted by everyone and that should have been maintained although it did not actually appear in the award. I argued to Commissioner Fogarty that continuity of the musicians' employment should be deemed not to have been broken by reason of transmission. The transfer of employment to a new manager, even though the Trust was no longer legally responsible, it having complied with the notice conditions, would ensure continuity of employment and the transfer of long service leave and other benefits. We unanimously sought an informal conference with the Commissioner after the hearing to see the reaction and where that would go.

The outcome was that it went into the award. This took a lot of work and negotiation with the union to get to that point. I wrote to the Australia Council to say we would be seeking a term, in a legal sense, protecting the musicians' employment; a Tribe recommendation anyway, and that the best way would be through their industrial award. Three years it took to get that into the award. Whilst this was going on, I was under constant attack from members of the orchestra on a variety of matters and it began to affect me. By the end of 1989 I was worn out by a barrage of innuendo. Unfortunately, they were personal, often unspoken implications and inferences that my actions, and those of the Trust, caused all their problems. They considered there were people at the Trust who did not like the orchestra.

After three years of it, I was disheartened to say the least. When I walked out of that Commission, I felt we had just achieved something for those players that they knew nothing about, which would protect their livelihood on transfer, and in spite of the flack over many silly things which would be resolved on transfer anyway. There seemed to be no joy in my working day. I always sought 8.30am meetings with the orchestra manager to bring myself up to date with what was going on and rarely left the office before 7pm. I often did not leave till 11pm if there was a performance with the need to liaise with orchestral management afterwards. I often worked Saturdays because of performances, as it was useful to be present in case of a problem. Sunday was my only day off. Given what we achieved in that moment in 1989 after years of work on their behalf, I felt the musicians were very ungrateful. When I left the Trust in 1990, I confess I was pleased to turn my back on the whole thing and completely change direction.

Orchestral Enterprises and OZ Bop

However, during 1987 my primary focus was on the award; a full time job involving a lot of communication and travel to Melbourne, but I managed *Orchestral Enterprises*, organizing other activities apart from the classical orchestras. One of these was a big band created by Sydney



Oz Bop with Trish O'Connor.

jazz player, Dave Ellis, a colleague, friend and fellow double bassist. A reliable player, creative and very artistic. He made his living as a recording musician but was always interested in big sound orchestras. He put together a commercially driven band to play jazz/ cabaret music with a singer, Trish O'Connor. Most of the musicians were people he worked with in studios; all good players and some 'names' among them. He got together ten players; two trumpets, a trombone, two saxophones, guitar, bass, drums and Trish. He named the band *Oz Bop* (Oz was the attempt to make it Australian) and his idea was to do arrangements and maybe some new compositions. They had an exceptionally good arranger, saxophonist Don Reid. The sound of the band was sophisticated and up-to-date in terms of jazz, like those big bands in America of the last fifty years such as Count Basie. It was disciplined; they played well together and provided great entertainment.

The publicity launch for *Oz Bop* and the show, *That Swing Thing*, was presented on 14th April 1987 at the Regent Hotel. There was good press coverage and I hoped to sell *Oz Bop* around the traps as it was contracted to my department.

Hayman Island Resort

Kathleen Norris did a deal with *Ansett Airlines* for the band to open the Hayman Island Resort, in the Whitsundays, Queensland. This new Resort was beautifully set up; luxurious, five star. The facilities for the band were good, the room was much better than the average cabaret room on the mainland and streets ahead of the average RSL club. But there were no guests and the overheads for the band were very high. Dave was wearing those. We were not taking financial responsibility; he was doing it for a fee. It lasted a couple of weeks and had to be pulled, bringing about the demise of the band because the musicians had to find employment. It was an attempt at something really good and could have been excellent but circumstances and a lack of understanding of the venue conspired. The resort could not provide the audience. It was not until about a year later they managed to make Hayman Island work. Our role was to put in cabaret entertainment with the band as backing and Kathleen's idea was to bring in cabaret entertainers to do shows every weekend. It would have worked had there been an audience but on the island there were no passers-by; they have to come to the island and stay. There were not many guests. It was too early; wrong timing. Later, we went to look at the Country Music Festival in Tamworth as Kathleen thought she might do something with country music and wanted my views.

In mid-1987 my department was approached by the Victorian Arts Centre Trust to engage an orchestra for Australian Ballet performances in December, a season traditionally done by the Melbourne Orchestra, which was not available. I was contracted to provide an orchestra as a commercial activity. This was basically the Elizabethan Sinfonietta Players I had been building and involved about sixty freelance players. I negotiated with VACT as the employer on behalf of the Ballet, managed by Sue Natrass. It was a full ballet orchestra and a good commercial opportunity for the Trust. Such things often came up when you least expected them. This is one of the reasons to keep a body of players on the 'books'. They were all booked at the eleventh hour and this can be stressful, but this freelance ensemble consisted of good players and had a high standard.

During 1986-87, the Trust accounts were computerized. Near the end of 1987, it was admitted the year had been one of extraordinary difficulty for Trust management. The origins of the problems from 1986 had forced a reactive position and senior management took the adverse results of that year very personally. There was a great deal of personal stress and disappointment

but also determination not to repeat it in 1988; the Entrepreneurial Department would take on only a few, non-risky, projects. The challenge for 1988 was to locate new premises and move. Sorting out if there would be any money from the Chalwin Estate continued for years with the hope that there could be a Chalwin Music Centre with two rehearsal rooms, including an orchestral sized one. When it did come, it was used much later for concert activity at the Independent Theatre.

The Trust accountant settled with the Australia Council how monies were disbursed but a grant condition meant orchestra funds were paid to a bank account other than the Trust's operational account. Rigorous and strong accounting requirements were applied; you could not hide a dollar anywhere. The Australia Council was working towards providing the Trust with funds for specified activities such as the Australian Content Department and orchestras, indicating the Trust had to find its running costs from elsewhere. By 1987 the Trust was receiving only \$30,000 for overheads so the loss on entrepreneurial activities had a big impact. The Trust had managed to keep itself afloat with donations received from the general public under its tax deductibility status. Membership was quite high and a source of income. Unless the Trust provided a specific service to the orchestra, none of the grant went to the Trust. When I began other musical projects at the Trust, the Trust paid for these, so my aim was to make a profit and be self-funding, which was the case. The Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra had expressed concern over financial independence, based on the unfounded belief that the Trust had access to orchestra funds. They were also concerned about the Trust's uncertain future.

Theatre Proprietors and Entrepreneurs Association

By December 1987 the overdraft with the bank had increased to over \$1.5 million. With the recognition that the future of the Trust was not as an entrepreneur, a big fundraising appeal was initiated to maintain other activities. Potential donors were invited to become founding members of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust donor fund. The Orchestras had limited possibilities for securing sponsorship and earning additional income, leaving a projected shortfall for 1988. One bright moment was my membership of the *Musicians' General Award* Subcommittee of the Theatre Proprietors and Entrepreneurs Association. This organization was very important as the peak body representing all arts companies. It was run by the astute William Parlour, a very good industrial advocate and overseer of arts industrial awards. By 1987 I was well and truly entrenched in negotiations with the unions over the *Opera Ballet Award* to the point where even Bill needed to be briefed when anything came up. I was on the ground and running with it along with John Bates. I was under the *Musicians' General Award* category and John was on the *Theatrical Employees and Managers' Awards* category. The object was to get people involved, especially in

the industrial area, who were active and working at the time, which was why I was invited to join. At that time Kathleen had not addressed this issue or taken any initiative to intervene in the status quo. Bill recognized the amount of work I was doing with John and that we should have a voice together in the association.

Kathleen Norris had always been very positive publicly about what she was doing for the Trust. I am not sure she understood there was a financial problem. Even with the loss on *Lennon* she was determined to move on and promote *Sugar Babies*. She was always looking for ways to solve the problem but she never recognized or articulated problems to us. She held regular weekly meetings with heads of department at which we submitted thorough, written reports on what we had done and the financial implications as well as success in relation to objectives. Reports were done the day before and discussed and questioned at the meeting. We usually came away thinking things would work out as everyone tried to make the best of projects. Kathleen did not address negative rumours, her style of management was to look for new things all the time.

Errol Chadwick, a management consultant, was brought in to look at Trust management and assess the situation. He reported to the Board in October 1987. He held 'a team effectiveness (management by objectives) meeting' with John Woodland (Entrepreneurial Manager), Mark Benvau (Trust finance control) and myself to define roles, agree on performance objectives, define appropriate structure for division heads and create a natural working team. He was very skilled at what he did, guiding and helping managements to focus on what they are supposed to do and not let peripherals get in the way. I do not think he understood the problems with the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, or the Elizabethan Philharmonic, as it was then. He was of the view that management was management and employees did what they were told within reason, otherwise they were dismissed. Management must manage in such a way that employees will do what they are told and that means negotiating industrially, talking to people and reaching workplace agreements. This approach was completely alien to the members of the orchestra in the Opera House pit. The commercial orchestra activity was no trouble at all. He set benchmarks, targets, objectives, realities, did SWOT analyses²⁴ on all projects to help reach a management decision, make sure it was funded and then do it. This was good advice which he took us through to help working together within the organization.

He proposed a structure for the CEO's team with a Performing Arts Subsidized Department that I would head, to include Australian Content, Theatre of the Deaf and the orchestra, John Woodland would head Performing Arts Unsubsidized and the other departments were finance, marketing, including fundraising, membership, educational lobbying, and business activities, hires, costumes, supply and *Halfrix*. He wanted all senior managers to have appropriate understanding

²⁴ SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

of each other's responsibilities and commitment to Trust objectives. I was very interested in the Theatre of the Deaf and saw some of their schools' performances. In implementing it there would need to be consensus with director, Patrick Mitchell, and Wendy Blacklock. Wendy had a clear, efficient vision to run Australian Content. Errol was referring to managerial reporting, having one person reporting to the CEO and to the directors, which is a clean method of communication so others can get on with projects. He was not looking to lose any positions and or change anyone's role, rather to tighten up the style of reporting and the chain of responsibility and to remove the possibility of one person reporting to two different bosses.

Kathleen Norris Resigns

Kathleen Norris resigned at a Board meeting on December 14th 1987 effective immediately. Stan Coonan, a senior management consultant from *Dewbury's*, was brought in as Acting CEO. My office at the Trust was diagonally opposite Kathleen's and I came in one day to work and there was a new person there, which was the first time most of us had heard this news. We were advised there would be a group of efficiency experts holding meetings with staff to analyze what and how we did our work. We recognized this as a restructure. I was not worried as I still had the same objectives; to transfer ESO and develop freelance activities in the department. The Entrepreneurial Department was more concerned about continuation and risk taking. Stan Coonan advised us the Trust had serious financial problems but he was very purposeful in trying to raise staff morale. Errol Chadwick had drafted plans for us to go forward in our various departments but Stan advised that some of these plans would not eventuate. Mark Benvau, the director of finance, resigned in October 1987, so the team had already changed. Stan advised that the Trust had to keep going with the orchestra and complete the transfer. He was happy for the other initiatives we had started, outside the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra, to continue. I did not hear much more until the building was sold and we moved to Regent Street. I was given a small orchestra room. Accounts, membership, Australian Content and the Theatre of the Deaf also moved there. I worked on transferring the orchestra; apart from reporting on progress, I was left pretty much on my own to do the job and to develop Australian Orchestral Enterprises. It stayed that way until the transfer of the Sydney Orchestra in January 1990.

The Artistic Directorship Question

On 21st December 1987, a week after Kathleen Norris' departure, I presented a discussion paper on the artistic direction of the Philharmonic Orchestra: the need for an artistic policy and director. I also prepared a confidential questionnaire to orchestral members asking what they thought an Artistic Director should be and how to achieve it. It was one area I thought needed

considerable discussion, despite procrastination. Some thought it should be the concertmaster, for others it could not be a player because they cannot make independently informed decisions, which could lead to favouritism. Others thought it had to be a conductor or one who did not conduct opera or ballet so there was a real independence. Others thought it had to be an opera conductor because this was the main work. They were not interested in having a ballet conductor because there was little respect for ballet conductors, which was completely unjustified. The orchestras had worked with some very good ballet conductors including John Lanchbery. At one stage it was suggested an academic, a PhD with music knowledge, would be appropriate. There were many different views. All of these needed to be aired and discussed in the right forum. Unfortunately, we could never get a meeting with everyone present. The other issue was that user companies had varying degrees of interest and some had very strong views.

The Opera Company had the strong view that the Opera artistic director should make all the decisions pertaining to the orchestra it used. The Ballet did not want the Opera making all decisions on the orchestra they needed. There were many agendas to cope with. At the end of the day, though, most people thought it would be a conductor. The other issue arose in relation to the pending transfer and conditions of transfer to a new owner who had not been identified at the time. You do not want to put in place someone who a new owner would have to take on and not want. We could not offer tenure to any potential candidate because we knew we were transferring. If we had not been transferring it would have been done differently. The questionnaire resulted in the appointment of John Grundy²⁵ who became Artistic Adviser or Artistic Director to the orchestra. He was in the role at the time of transfer and was accepted by most of the people so it was probably a very good compromise.

²⁵ John Grundy (1947-), pianist, Music Director for the Sydney based orchestra 1988-1995, also Music Director Sydney Philharmonia Choirs 1988-1991. In 2006 founded the Sheffield Music Academy in the UK.

