

New Directions – Australian Orchestral Enterprises

My job with the Sydney Orchestra, the awards and building new opportunities for the casual players, was time-consuming and narrowly focused; it did not expand sideways much. More involvement in outside activities might have been good for me, a bit of a saviour from the stresses and personal problems I was experiencing on a daily basis.

I was working long hours; doing paperwork, answering queries, memorandums, making sure everyone was informed, while being aware you were being looked over because you were in an organization accused of not communicating. I made sure everything was written down. Most of it was minor communication designed to get to the next stage but at the time it was important because often the musicians would declare they did not know something. This was often because they did not read the communications. I had to have meetings with the orchestra; necessary for operational reasons in relation to rostering. The last thing you want to do is put rostering forward which was going to impact on the players without their knowledge and the only way to do that was to call meetings but these were poorly attended; of sixty-nine people you would be lucky to get five attendees. They may have had better attendance for their own meetings but we were never copied into the results of their internal discussions. We were not getting the voice of the orchestra, just the loudest one or two.

By late 1987, I was Trust Industrial Relations Officer and heading up *Australian Orchestral Enterprises*. Stan Coonan reviewed the situation in the clear light of day and in March 1988 we had final agreement for the opera ballet award. I agreed to two basic responsibilities; a supervisory role over the management of the Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra and an active, hands-on role with *Orchestral Enterprises*. Along the way I would look after the relevant awards industrially and any other award issues for the Trust. For the Elizabethan Philharmonic my clear responsibility was concert planning for 1988 and 1989 and negotiations associated with the scheduling of the activities for 1989 which meant user agreement contracts with the EPO, the transfer of new management negotiations, continuation of the Opera Ballet award, and supervision of the EPO management. An administrator, responsible to me, and for the orchestral manager, an assistant orchestral manager and related staff, would be appointed. My secretary, Ann, would be still my responsibility. I was not involved in the selection process which appointed Bruce Applebaum¹. Unfortunately he started on the eve of the next annual grant application submission, so he was thrown in at the deep end. I do not think he had a lot of experience with this. There was about \$2.1 million of public money to justify and make the budget in the format the Australia Council



Warwick Ross, Australian Orchestral Enterprises—*Trust News* December 1988.

¹ Bruce Applebaum studied Arts Administration at UTS. He is Co-founder (with Paul Dyer), Managing Director and a Board member of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019.

would accept and the Trust financial director could deal with. He had a difficult task. I was there to help and supervise, but not to do it. He did a pretty good job in getting that through, after which he had the day to day management and all the problems I had been experiencing. I was very happy to leave the daily running of the orchestra to his administration and to leave the constant niggling and complaining coming from them to management. How he coped I have no idea but he survived.

At the end of 1987 the Chairman said the Trust had one of three options: 'to go into liquidation, appoint an official manager or work with a new structure in conjunction with auditors'. (**1987 Annual Report—President's message and Chairman's address**) The Board decided on the latter, with Stan Coonan at the helm. Within a month he noted an underfunded shortfall of around \$107,000 for 1988 for the orchestra to remain in a holding position. The Australia Council had concern for the viability of the Trust. Daily costs of operation exceeded income and there was fear of adverse publicity. It appears the Trust was technically insolvent as current liabilities greatly exceeded current assets. Departments were asked to present details of their resources, people and hours worked, which in my department included John Miller, Peter Horn, Patricia Pears and Ann Robinson. In January 1988 the Trust extricated itself from the Hayman Island Resort with a payout of \$20,000. Before taking leave to get married in January 1988, I sought to re-establish orchestra standing committees and continue the implementation of *The Tribe Report* by conforming to the Report's recommendations of representation. Morale was at an all-time low. It was a terrible environment to work in. People were down and wondering what to do. Not everyone could focus on solving the problem, they were interested in just removing themselves from it. We were all looking after our own departments. I was an exception. Most of the others were really concerned they would not have any money tomorrow. I knew we had money to run because it was an Australia Council grant and was protected by the manner of its execution, so that was not going to get gobbled up. I was more concerned my initiatives with the freelance orchestras might get damaged but they were profitable. I made sure I budgeted and managed every one of those on a break-even. Even though the profits were not huge they were always net profits I budgeted to, not gross income. I was confident if the Trust disappeared I could go to another space and run this as long as I had a telephone. I could see other administrative staff probably at a loss as to what was going to happen. The Australia Council was being slow with grant payments and decision making, so there were still problems to be addressed in the light of the Trust's overall financial position.

There was no honeymoon, although I took two weeks leave! I met my wife, Patricia Gould, in 1984 on one of the last shows I worked as a musician, a tour of *Camelot* with Richard Harris.²

² This production, directed by Richard Harris who also played King Arthur, toured to Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth from September to December 1984. Presented by *Kevin Jacobsen Productions* and Pat Condon.

She was working on the show. We decided to marry in January 1988 and bought a ten hectare property in the Barrington Tops. There was a lot of work to do on that holding. I forgot about orchestras, although I did some recordings. Everyone knew I was not to be disturbed. Stan Coonan would have solved any issues without disturbing me.

“... battered, bloodied and bowed”

In February 1988 the *Bulletin* described the Trust as ‘battered, bloodied and bowed’. Noel Ferrier had left and there was a loss of over \$1.9 million. The Dowling St building had been sold late in 1987.³ Membership was approaching 11,000. Trevor Brooks was the Trust marketing director. It was clear John Woodland and the Entrepreneurial staff would be the first to go and probably closely followed by Publicity. John resigned in February 1988 at which point it seemed that all staff cuts had concluded and the Trust could now build staff morale, previously difficult while resignations were being encouraged. There was preparation to recruit a CEO through advertising in early March 1988. My little corner of the floor was guaranteed, wherever that floor was. The Theatre of the Deaf and Australian Content Department found other ways to continue and as valuable units continued to be supported by funding bodies. It was clear things like the costumes and technical items would go, and I remember the unique auction on 15th October 1988 to sell off the ‘stuff’ in the basement. “Thirty-four years of theatre history under the hammer

Trust costumes on parade,
Trust News, October 1988



... lighting equipment, fancy dress ... costumes, props, thrones, coffins, masks and so on.” I bought some things including a Neptune trident, for which I had no use, but they were great to have. They were cheap, just a few dollars here and there. There were big things, but I did not buy anything of substance. The Trust had sole domain over lighting hire in Sydney for a long time as *Rank* at Liverpool had set up in opposition only in the previous few years. Unfortunately, the lamps were pretty old fashioned ones. There were a lot of cables and an enormous amount of props. Wayne Kellett, who was looking after lighting

³ In 2021 the building at 153 Dowling Street, Kings Cross, houses the offices of the Cancer Council NSW and retains many of its original features. In 2016 there was a celebration to mark the building’s 100th year.

equipment and hires at the time, had a good sense of humour and treated it as a bit of fun. There was no depression around it at all. I think they sold most of it. The array of stuff, spread all over the bottom floor of the Trust Dowling Street building, was huge. Anywhere you walked there was something for sale except for many of the costumes. Michael James, who ran this department, intended to run a costume shop independently, which he did for a while. Then Rodney Seaborn bought most of them for his costume hire place and he and Michael worked together for a time. I used some of that great source of costumes for Sinfonietta events and they were great.

There was a Bicentennial dinner in the Grand Ballroom at the Wentworth Hotel on 21st March 1988 which included a tribute, "200 Years of the Theatre in Australia", devised by Judy White with Leonard Teale and Liz Harris. It was a black tie or 'theatrical costume' event. One of the guests was NSW Governor Roland. At this time we were planning for the orchestra to perform with the Sydney Philharmonia Society at the Opera House on 21st May 1988 and with Cillario as guest conductor at the Gough Whitlam Centre, Liverpool, as part of the Liverpool Bicentennial festivities in May. There was also a concert in the Great Hall of Sydney University with new works by Malcolm Williamson⁴ and Colin Brumby⁵. My correspondence with Williamson was interesting. He was Master of the Queen's Music at that time and writing from London. He was grateful, gracious and very nice to deal with. He was also quite specific about his musical needs.

The Elizabethan Sinfonietta

I had hoped the Soloists of Australia or the Elizabethan Sinfonietta would play at the opening of Parliament House, Canberra, on 9th May 1988. Apparently, the government was reluctant to pay as other groups were offering their services free. The Trust tried to raise some corporate sponsorship but was not successful. The 1987 *Babies' Prom* made a profit of over \$1500 and from the Australian Ballet season of *Giselle* there was a profit of \$18,000. We also recorded a television commercial for *Cherry Films*. This was shot through the orchestra and focussed on the timpani player for an American television advertisement for *Konica* photocopiers which was not seen in Australia. The timpanist had lost his part and someone rushed out to photocopy it and got back just when he had to play. It was a shot of the orchestra playing while he was worrying about what to play and the photocopier had saved the day. The orchestra also played for the Croatian opera, *Zrinski*, at the Opera House. There was great support from the ethnic community which subsequently influenced my way of working at the Independent Theatre, getting the community audience to support cultural events.

There was a training program I put together to retrain musicians for work outside of their normal sphere of things if they wanted to stop playing. I put together a proposal to the NSW

Bicentennial Dinner

The Trust is making its own contribution to the Bicentenary Year with a tribute to 200 years of theatre in Australia. Devised by Judy White and presented by leading Australian artists, including Leonard Teale and Liz Harris, who'll be portraying Lola Montez, the tribute will be a highlight of the Trust's Bicentennial Dinner to be held at the Grand Ballroom, Wentworth Hotel, on Monday, March 21. Guests of honour are the Governor, Sir James Rowland, and Lady Rowland. Tickets are \$60.00 each and can be reserved by phoning the Trust on 357 1200. Dress is black tie or theatrical costume.

⁴ Malcolm Williamson, AO, CBE (1931-2003), Australian composer, Master of the Queen's Music 1975-2003.

⁵ Colin Brumby (1933-2018), Australian composer, conductor and teacher.

government for a pilot project but I left the job before it proceeded. I was interested in helping musicians like Maurice Stead who was suffering from RSI, could barely play, and retraining them to do something else. Maurice bought and ran a newsagency in Melbourne for a while. Many were doing other things; like myself, I had been a player and turned to administration. Most people had taken other directions with no formal or adequate training in that discipline and had to find out the hard way. If musicians, particularly older players, did not want to or could not play anymore, training was important, although not flavour of the day until Paul Keating was elected Prime Minister. The New South Wales government did allocate \$50,000 for a pilot scheme.

In February 1988 I wrote a letter to the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with the idea of an exchange program for musicians with opera houses around the world. It was a proposal I thought might work well for the Sydney Orchestra and particularly for younger players who were of an appropriate standard to exchange for six months or a season and come back with skills they did not have when they left. I think my understanding of the English player was such that often when an Australian turns up there is a new approach taken to the playing and it can be very positive for the music scene if they are a good player. Such an initiative would have to involve the orchestral management at the time but nothing came of it. It was an attempt to re-think and change the working environment. Even I was getting downtrodden by the notion of playing in the pit and I was not in the orchestra but I could feel it, day in, day out, a difficult environment.

The demands and pressure of the workload are huge, coupled with not knowing where your future is. Unfortunately, in March 1988, Ann Robinson, administrative secretary for the orchestras, tendered her resignation as she found the working conditions less than attractive. With insecurity concerning the future, she had been looking for another job. She was tired of being treated like a junior by other members of staff and needed more money. She felt she had no choice despite enjoying the work. Ann and I were experienced in what we did and she was a very good secretarial support. She was a thinker, helped people and could predict and troubleshoot problems. I relied on her a great deal. When I was away from Sydney I could be sure if I asked for something it would be done immediately. There were often things I needed in the industrial arena that she took care of straight away with just a phone call. It was a great loss for me but I could see she was becoming frustrated without respect for what she did. She was treated like a typist and people in other departments did not understand her role. Within orchestral management she was seen as my secretary and someone you could order around. She addressed the question of money but there was no money; the budget was pre-set. We were moving to a new era that was unlikely to get money for administrative staff, let alone an increase. She was looking for something to engage her mind more. I think during the transfer to Melbourne and the award, she was motivated, interested, and there was a lot of work with the voluminous documentation I dictated onto a

machine and she turned into documents. She was reliable and fast. I was pleased she obtained a job at a country radio station announcing and running programs.

Crisis Management

In March 1988, the Trust was in crisis management, being attacked from all sides. The Australia Council sought changes to the Trust Board, saying it had been too long entrenched. The Board resisted Australia Council pressure and did not take the issue into the public domain. Trust directors are elected by the members and resisted those with vested interests, regardless of the pressure from the funding source. In 1988 Rodney Seaborn joined the Board and James Strong became Chairman of Directors. Later Rodney's generous involvement saw him step in and save the Trust. I did not meet him until we came into the Independent Theatre in 2000 and there I had a close relationship with him for two or three years. In 1988, the Trust was the only organization eligible to receive tax deductible donations for the arts. Donations were given unconditionally, but donors could nominate their preferred recipient company and although the Trust was not bound to pass it to the named organization, it generally honoured the donor's request, enabling an enormous range of groups, from local choirs, community theatres to the Australian Ballet to receive donations from the general public. (**1988 Annual Report**, pp 22-25). This was not a money-making activity for the Trust, whose staff processed hundreds of donations every year. The Trust was proposing a 2% levy on donations going through its tax deductible system and there were many protests about it; the Australian Opera being one of the most vocal. The Trust was carrying the administrative and banking costs of this process and, given financial pressures, was looking to ways to contain costs. Donors were not really concerned but recipient organizations wanted the full donation and once again responded negatively to the Trust's actions. When other 'commissions' (an artist has to pay an agent 33% to sell work), are considered, a 2% levy was very reasonable. It did seem that many wanted the Trust to close. The balance had shifted as the Australia Council became the national body overseeing the arts.

The Trust was a tall poppy that everyone had to cut down. There was fuel for this view; information in the public domain about the struggling arts, the Trust's supposedly taking money from donors when money is flowing in, the orchestras not being appropriately run. There was enough press coverage to draw a picture for many that this was an outdated organization. It was hard to counteract. The Board was an experienced group, who knew the business world very well and were prepared to give up their time. The arts community was not in a good frame of mind. Overall the economy was not flourishing, sponsorship was very difficult to find. Organizations such as the Bond Corporation⁶ were in trouble: excess spending and corporate wastage was

⁶ Established by Alan Bond in 1974, he and the company were bankrupted by 1992.

beginning to take its toll. Wendy Blacklock was looking for corporate money for projects without much success and I found it very difficult to get a chance to put your case to the corporates. The world was changing.

One of my tasks was a re-evaluation of the Trust owned musical instruments as assets. The new orchestra management did not want them and it became necessary to sell them. A general market value is easy enough to obtain but for an individual instrument, depending on its make and whether it has been regularly played and maintained, is not so easy. I obtained assessments from instrument dealers to understand the possible range of value. Tommy Sparkes, a specialist in wind instruments, provided estimates based on the history of each instrument. I considered the book value of the instrument and came up with a likely sale value. We would have preferred to sell them all to one organization such as the Orchestra's new owners. Some of the instruments were being played, such as the timpani and contrabassoon. I considered it appropriate to offer the 64 instruments out to tender. In February 1990 I hired a space at the Wharf, Hickson Road, The Rocks, Sydney, where Graeme Murphy's Sydney Dance Company was based. We set them out on the floor and invited people to tender. Information was sent out to musicians. We received 34 acceptable offers, totalling about \$37,000. Nineteen received no offer at all and 11 received unacceptable offers. These instruments were given some maintenance and repair work, which I costed and recommended to the Trust management. Ultimately, they were sold but the process took the whole year.

Music Management Consultant

I resigned, effective from March 31st 1988, becoming the Trust's Music Management Consultant. Bruce Applebaum became the orchestra's temporary administrator. In April the Australian Opera advised it was not interested in taking over the Sydney Orchestra, and the Australia Council advised the Trust it had breached its grant conditions by not providing audited financial statements by 31st March. Grant payments were suspended until accounts were received; the grant was paid on a monthly basis after that. I had limited time to develop my department as Bruce learnt the job. My responsibilities for the orchestra had been concert planning negotiations and scheduling for 1989; user company agreements and contracts for EPO with the Ballet and Opera and negotiations of transfer to new management plus the Opera Ballet award and general supervision of the EPO management. Most of this was delegated to Bruce. It seems the Australia Council took advantage of this changeover to further criticize and penalize the Trust through the grant payments.

One of the issues to be discussed about the disposal of the orchestra was the reserve the Trust had of \$436,000. The cost to disband was estimated at \$525,000 and we did not believe

the Australia Council would allow an offset against the reserve for termination payments. There was a great fear at this time that the orchestra's position, or the Trust's position if the orchestra went, would be even worse because none of this was clarified. Later, the Trust sought legal advice on this but these were issues to be considered. If the orchestra was disbanded each member would require holiday and long service leave accrued plus termination payment of twelve weeks, making disbandment costs substantial. I did not have any personal involvement in discussions with the Australia Council but was having to address daily the 'What happens if?' scenario. In the award we wanted to transfer them with full entitlement. If that is the case, where is this entitlement coming from or is it going to be a credit the Australia Council will accept that it pays when it is due? I had to analyze what those amounts were, who would or would not transfer, who was eligible for long service leave that might be taken up soon, involving a cash flow issue, and who was there with entitlements that may never be taken up. With sixty-nine people and many of them long-serving, in excess of five years, there were substantial entitlements to long service leave. With every document, I was constantly adding up bottom line figures. I held on to the notion that if the Trust had a reserve it would have to be used for the benefit of the transfer rights and entitlements. It could not go to the user company nor should it go back to the Australia Council as unspent monies because it had been allocated against entitlements. It was \$70,000 short if you looked at the past history where the Trust had been owed this money. I thought in the final transfer it would be the most difficult issue; something for the user company or the new owners of the orchestra to negotiate with the Australia Council, not us.

There was a Masked Ball at the *Intercontinental Hotel* on December 31st, for which we provided an Orchestra in costume. I was discussing a proposal with the Callaway Trust in Western Australia, *Musica Viva* and the Trust for sponsorship to develop commercial recordings. We performed in a *Kleenex* television commercial at the Opera House; all events I felt were tests to see if we could make a go of *Australian Orchestral Enterprises*. My motive was to give work to casual players so they would be available to work with the Sydney Orchestra as extras and give a guarantee of high quality performance. I hoped to regenerate the freelance industry after the demise of recording sessions.

Adam Salzer, New Trust CEO

In June 1988 the Board appointed a new CEO, Adam Salzer. (*Trust News* 1988.) Given the situation, he needed to hit the ground running and had clear ideas about communication between the orchestra administration and the Opera. He cut back entrepreneurial activity and saw the Music Management Department as having potential for a high profile and quality image for the Trust. He came in to solve difficult problems. Not only was the Trust in financial difficulty;



Adam Salzer, a NIDA graduate, was Artistic Director of the NSW Theatre of the Deaf in 1975-76 on a Director's Development Grant from the Australia Council. He directed the group's production of *King Lear*, presented by the AETT at the Seymour Centre, Sydney, in November 1976.

it had no resources and had to improve its image. Adam was a very positive publicist whose view was to find and promote good ideas and projects. He changed the Trust logo to a theatrical image, focussing on 'The Trust' rather than the long title involving Elizabethan (was that Shakespearean or to do with Queen Elizabeth?). While he did not drop the reference to our patron and Australian and theatre, he focused on 'The Trust', which was quite effective. He devised and developed the concept of an Arts Card and how the Trust could build it into its activities. Cardholders would have access to events and commercial products, including wine, free or at reduced prices.

Adam saw the need for an amicable transfer of the Elizabethan Philharmonic, so the job was to transfer it smoothly with as few ruffled feathers as possible, and once the transfer was done, to develop the positives related to 'Orchestral Enterprises' projects. We had done a couple of dates, the opera, *Zrinski*, and the *Konica* commercial with a profit on the books. Most arts organizations did not show a profit, subsidy was to cover costs. We were operating independently without grants and Adam could see the potential. He asked what I could make of the Orchestral Department after transfer. I believed there would be work available through organizations like *Edgleys*. There were possible commercials and people were approaching me with ideas, which I encouraged.

Music 'To Suit The Occasion'

We promoted the Elizabethan Sinfonietta with a small brochure offering **music 'to suit the occasion'**. One of these events in 1988 was an enjoyable Bicentennial Ball at Castle Hill RSL Club with a Viennese theme. The Trust costume department provided appropriate costumes and we played Strauss waltzes and polkas. In the past, no doubt the club had hired big dance bands but I was happy to advise the repertoire was well within the orchestra's ability. The program was a selection of music from my *Edgley* and London days. The RSL manager was delighted with the idea of a costumed orchestra. A young conductor, Henryk Pisarek⁷ was engaged. I explained the music was rather specialized to play for a ball. Some of the waltzes people may not know and they were fast. The tempo changes were traditional. The organizer wanted these but suggested we be prepared for it to be more like a concert if people did not dance. Many sat and listened and loved it. Some knew how to dance Viennese waltzes, others danced to the dance band when we took a break. We played four or five different sets through the night while a regular house band played contemporary dance music. My view was endorsed that audiences can be found in the most unlikely places if you take the music to them; they loved the music and the atmosphere was superb.

The Sinfonietta also presented a concert in early 1988 for the Perth Festival. Unfortunately, the demands of the presenter were difficult: no air-conditioning in the height of summer, they



'Among the many exciting new benefits available to holders of The Arts Australia Card is the chance to become a VIP Member and be in the running for a free trip to New York and Broadway. All you have to do send written invitations to five people encouraging them to become members of The Trust. If you have not received details of this great opportunity call your Trust office today.' —*Trust News*, December 1988

⁷ Henryk Pisarek, conductor and teacher (Sydney Conservatorium of Music). Artistic Director of Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra (1995), Penrith Symphony Orchestra (2002-2007), East West Orchestra and has been Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Sydney Youth Orchestra. Received 2003 The Orchestras of Australia (TOAN) Network Award for services to community orchestras.



Maestro Jackson and the Sinfonietta rehearsing *The Rite of Spring*.

requested a very long program, the stage management was inadequate and payment was late. The performers expressed great unhappiness about such experiences and were subsequently released from an Adelaide Festival engagement. I was preparing many quotes to try and get work flowing. There was a lot of interest and we demonstrated that we were capable of providing a useful resource to people like Michael Edgley, resulting in the orchestra accompanying Stefan Milenkovich⁸, then a ten year old violin prodigy from Serbia, in Brisbane and Sydney. Not everything eventuated, but we had a pretty healthy year in 1988-89.

Providing the Elizabethan Sinfonietta for Royal Ballet performances at the Sydney Entertainment Centre in July 1988 was very successful.⁹ This season was prestigious and

financially viable. Sixty-two players were required for performances in the Entertainment Centre, which was a huge barn, but the program drew a large audience. It was entirely commercial; Pat Condon and Michael Edgley were behind it. We fielded an orchestra of good players, many of whom had worked in the Entertainment Centre with people like Tommy Tycho¹⁰ and were used to its barn-like environment. There was a triple bill to prepare; the hardest work musically was *The Rite of Spring*. Isaiah Jackson, an African-American who worked with the company in London, was an exacting conductor. We rehearsed at the Showground and had two three hour calls on *The Rite of Spring*. This was a work you would expect to do at least seven or eight calls for. With *Edgleys* there was no money for excessive rehearsals and they advised the Ballet that the orchestra had a reputation for bringing things together quickly on minimum rehearsal. They were session players used to such expectations. Four or five calls were scheduled. At the end of the second call I asked the conductor if there were any problems, knowing he would have assessed the players. His response was that the orchestra was ‘amazing—like a New York session orchestra’, meaning it

⁸ Stefan Milenkovich (b. 1977 in Belgrade, Serbia), child prodigy who subsequently studied at the Julliard School in America and pursues an international career as a classical violinist.

⁹ The company toured to three Australian cities, the repertoire was *Manon*, *Swan Lake* and a triple bill of David Bintley’s *Still Life at the Penguin Café*, Frederick Ashton’s *Rhapsody* and Kenneth Macmillan’s *Rite of Spring*.

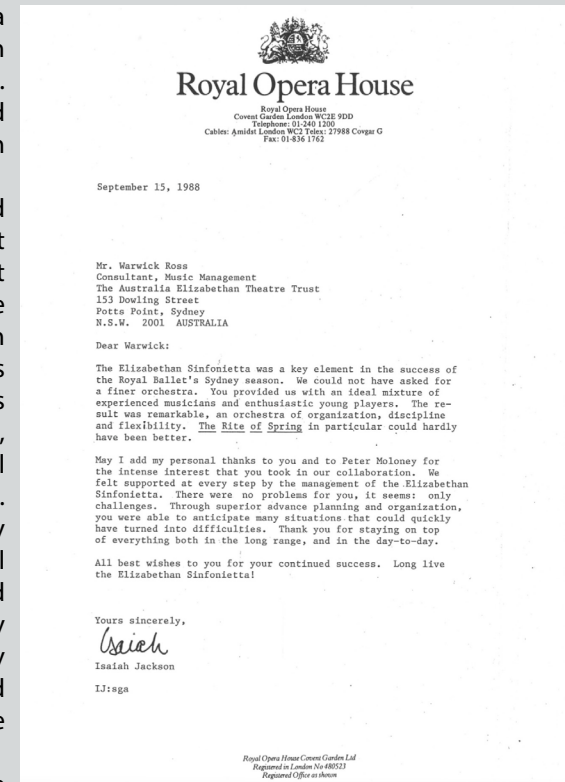
¹⁰ Tommy Tycho AM, MBE (1928-2013), Hungarian born Australian pianist, conductor, composer, arranger.

read fast, delivered and maintained high standard for the duration. From a musical point of view it was very successful. The orchestra was in full view, in front of a built-up stage. We were well paid and the conductor was delighted. Later, I received a letter of commendation from the Royal Opera House signed by Jackson saying it was a splendid occasion with absolutely no problem arising from the orchestra.

We used the new Trust logo and felt that the Trust's battered image seemed to have taken a turn for the better. We hoped the music industry might accept the Trust as a leader, an innovator in music activity which I sought to develop and coordinate on a national scale. We needed an impressive face and efficient high quality administrative support staff to win and retain confidence. Peter Maloney was the casual orchestra manager and things looked positive and hopeful. I considered that many of the individual players represented the Sydney music industry. They lived locally and, five players, who were leaders or concertmasters, collectively controlled the orchestral scene including recording sessions; the lifeblood of the Sydney music scene. Outside of the Sydney Symphony and the Opera Ballet Orchestras, the Tommy Tycho and Bobby Limb¹¹ orchestras for television channels and the occasional big Entertainment Centre spectaculars, were all fixed: those orchestras and musicians all came via these people. Although good friends, they were highly competitive: their livelihood depended on how many recording sessions they got in a week. They had no interest in the politics of it; they wanted good available players who would turn up on time. If a player did not play well, he was not used again. It was very like London; no animosities, no politics.

It was refreshing. I had access to these people working through the Sinfonietta; play well and be well paid. With something challenging, like *The Rite of Spring*, the music was good quality because there were good players. For example, of the two trumpet players with our orchestra for *Aida* in 1988-89, the principal had come from the Sands Orchestra in Las Vegas, backing people like Frank Sinatra. He had then specialized in classical music and came to Australia. The person sitting next to him had been principal trumpet in the London Philharmonic for fourteen years and retired to Australia. With such players, inevitably there was a fantastic sound. They inspired and raised the standard of other brass players around them. I paid everyone within a week, if not on the night. The reputation was that the Trust was reliable. You did not have to wait for, or argue about, money. It was always what was agreed. I also made a policy of advising

¹¹ Robert 'Bobby' Limb, AO, OBE (1924-1999), Popular Australian musician and entertainer on radio, television and theatre, especially during the 1960s and 1970s.



upfront the entire conditions of the date, which generally was not done in Australia. Even when you came into the Opera Ballet Orchestra or the Symphony Orchestra there would be a contract but it would refer you to the award or to employment conditions in the ABC or the Trust and you had to go searching. I set out all the details in one letter, even down to the nitty-gritty of how to get there, where to park, what to wear. The consequence was that when people came into the orchestra they knew exactly where they were. We always did the seating in advance so when a player was booked they knew where they would sit in the orchestra. To make sure there were no objections, the concertmaster and I would work this out before booking anyone. When they came in, they knew exactly where they were, what to do and what the conditions were. This gave the Trust credibility as an organization providing work. Had we continued and managed to get some help through sponsorship funding, we would have probably made something of this. The time was right for the orchestra and musicians, but not the Trust. After I left, the players went back to freelance work and potential dates were lost.

At this time, the Trust's Australian Content department featured at *World Expo 1988* in Brisbane with Jack Davis's plays, *Barungin* and *Honey Spot*, with Indigenous actors. These subsequently toured overseas; a great achievement for Wendy Blacklock's department as there were many challenges keeping the company together. They received a very good response.

Also at this time, Adam was considering the possibility of establishing boards of the Trust in each state aiming to get more support from other state governments and to keep the national image of the Trust alive.

Transferring the Sydney Orchestra

By 1988 everything was ready to transfer the Sydney orchestra. The Trust was no longer aspiring to maintain ownership. At the same time, since 85% of Australia Council funding to the Trust went to the orchestra, there was concern about loss of prestige and purpose. The Melbourne situation had demonstrated what could be done in a united way. They maintained communication with the Trust and found willing, worthy owners who were prepared to, and did, fight for them in an industrial forum where it was hard to improve conditions substantially and change the award. By the time they transferred, that job was almost complete. It had been demonstrated that an orchestra could transfer to a better situation. We had to do the same with Sydney. The big problem was how and to whom; even the orchestra had voted against transfer and the Australian Opera blew hot and cold on whether they wanted to take on the responsibility. Firstly, the management of the orchestra had to be brought into line. It was running on its own agenda and making its own decisions. It was difficult because there was a constant fight between the Ballet, the Opera and the orchestra, and within those three every individual would have, and

express, a different view. A volatile situation. An early vote to stay with the Trust was not really the voice of the entire orchestra although it may have been of the majority. This was something needing unanimous support as in Melbourne where there was unanimous support for the new managers.

In Sydney we needed a management which would allow the orchestra to function properly and maintain constant communication with the Ballet and Opera. I had to go to the Australia Council early in 1988 to advise the funding was inadequate; the budget could not be trimmed further and it was impossible for the orchestra to exist on the current level of funding. There was also serious litigation pending against the Melbourne Orchestra in relation to harpist, Susan Smith. She had been warned about her proficiency, she transferred to the Victorian Orchestra management (VACT), resigned and began claiming compensation for cancellation of her proficiency loading. This was a matter for the new owners because she transferred from us with all her employment entitlements. Such issues were a constant reminder of communication problems.

Once agreement was reached that the Sydney Orchestra would transfer, the players were concerned about their jobs and security of entitlements, particularly as I moved sideways at the Trust to develop *Australian Orchestral Enterprises* and deal with the award which did not come into place until 1989. There were discussions with the companies using the orchestra with little bush-fires put out all the time. I had a meeting with senior administrative staff at the Australian Opera and was told that the Company's perception of our decision to transfer ownership was that the Trust was prepared to dump the orchestra. That was not the view of the directors. The Trust would protect the interests of the musicians up until the day after transfer when the new owner would have the responsibility. We had that enshrined into their industrial award. We also agreed we would not do anything about artistic direction if they were going to transfer. It would be wrong to appoint a permanent artistic director but we should have people helping where they could. I saw the need to delegate the day-to-day management of the orchestra to someone who would look after the interests of the Opera, Ballet and the orchestra.

There were three important issues in the transfer of the Sydney Orchestra. One was industrial relations which I was looking after. Another was the relationship with the Opera and the Ballet, which was improving. The Opera was willing to talk and provide things the orchestra had wanted for years, like advanced scheduling. The other one was rostering and communication; the most problematic, which remained until the end. The Opera would insist they have the same principal players of key instruments for the whole season. A quite justifiable request, but the orchestra insisted this was not the Opera's business. If a player provided was a member of the orchestra, they were adequate to do the job; it was not up to the Opera to determine that. In the process

to bring outside players in, the orchestra was asked to give recommendations in advance as to who should be off or on, but they constantly failed to provide the information in an adequate time frame. It is not easy to book casual players; they are not waiting around for the phone to ring. They might be available for eight of the ten calls for which they are needed, but could not do the other two. Their availability could fluctuate until they were contracted to do the work. The orchestral management needed advance notice about player requirements for different repertoire and which players would be off and when, before a replacement could be contracted. This problem continued up until the day of transfer and was virtually a full time job for the orchestral management. I thought it wise for me to step sideways, with someone else in that role given the work involved in the transfer. We also needed to negotiate an agreement between the new owners and the Trust and there was not much lead time. In fact, it seemed almost impossible to transfer them by the target date of December 31st 1989. Although the new management had established a board of management, there was no proposal from them in relation to entitlements. We needed to see that entitlements transferring remained intact, that superannuation would be stable and the books would show things like long service leave entitlements. We had to ensure money was there to cover entitlements. We were holding surpluses for this but had to be sure there were legal documents in place to protect those entitlements. When lawyers are involved in such documentation, it takes time, impossible to do in a few months.

In August/September 1989 the *Trust News* reported on a major project, the *Aida* trip to Tokyo following the success of the 1988 Sydney performance. This was negotiated through *Kevin Jacobsen Pty Limited*.¹² We had been engaged to provide the orchestra at the Sydney Football Stadium for the International Opera Festival. *Jacobsens* knew of me through *Edgleys*, so they were happy for me to be the recommended source for an orchestra. Incredibly tense negotiations began in April 1989 for the Japanese performances. We submitted a quote. They wanted a big orchestra, 116 in the pit plus another 16 stage trumpets for the fanfare. The focus was the conductor, Giuseppe Raffa¹³, who had a wild shock of black hair. A typical Italian conductor with a very good pedigree, he had worked with Italian singers and opera; he knew his stuff. He spoke English and was the driving force behind the whole thing; maybe even the main investor in the Festival. We had established a good rapport over the Sydney season and he trusted my judgement. He was happy for me to get the players and leave the rest to him. The contracting, however, had a big question mark over it. With further research, I discovered the Festival was in litigation with one of the companies they were using and there was a dispute over payment from a previous occasion. This was an international company with no Australian legal presence, in litigation over



Maestro Giuseppe Raffa

¹² Kevin Jacobsen OAM (1937-), entertainment entrepreneur, former member of 1960s band with his brother, Col Joye and the Joy Boys. Presented many international artists in Australia including Barbra Streisand, *The Bee Gees*, The Three Tenors and Olivia Newton-John.

¹³ Giuseppe Raffa (1959-), Italian conductor of large scale opera performances around the world.



Giuseppe Raffa, conductor, with Warwick Ross, during rehearsal in the Tokyo Dome.

an employment issue. *Jacobsens* would not contract for the overseas tour. We had contracted through them for the Australian dates but they were not interested; were simply acting as an agent. To take 116 players out of Australia to Tokyo, I needed good security. The budget was over \$100,000. We came to an agreement that I would contract International Opera Festival with tight controls over the way funds were dispersed. I drafted an agreement having discussed details with the conductor, and insisted on a deposit of over \$50,000, to be followed by a further payment of \$30,000 by particular dates. If the television recording was done, a further payment was due by a stated date. We were to go to Tokyo for the first rehearsal on 8th July, for three rehearsals and three performances. I planned to ensure we had \$60,000 in the bank in Australia so we could afford to return home if there was a disaster. *Qantas*, as our official carrier, generously offered to

freight all the instruments and provided air tickets; a great sponsorship. We maintained full control over the movement of the orchestra from their home base in Australia until they returned. Peter Maloney and I loaded the instrument containers travelling in the hold while some instruments were players' hand luggage. We had full control over freight, ticketing and an aircraft. The International Opera Festival had no rights over the travel. We received a deposit of about \$60,000 up front before we stepped off Australian soil. On the first day of rehearsal, three days before the opening night, another payment was due and another two payments were due before we opened. We did not have to make any threats but it was clear that if they defaulted, we could be on the flight back to Sydney before the opening. It was touch and go all the way because this negotiation was not easy. We were competing against American and Canadian orchestras for the date. Raffa wanted the Australian one because he felt it was an orchestra he could work with and did not budge from this position. We had an in-principle agreement but, of course, the problem was getting people to put this into writing. We did not get agreement of the details until May 1st for travel on July 6th. It was stressful. I had to book 116 players to be away for a week and their availability was subject to offering them firm dates. They all wanted to go but had to live and would take other work if this did not happen. I had the problem of holding players without contracts until the main contract was in place. By May 15th everything was agreed. There was pressure for the organizers as they had to market the performances. The closer we got to the date, the more unlikely it was they could get another orchestra from elsewhere, but it was a tense time. James Waites, writing in the *Trust News* in August/September 1989, observed about this trip that, "The Orchestra is a reflection of the aggressive spirit shown by an increasingly more professional Trust these days", and certainly this orchestra represented the Trust very well. It was of the highest artistic quality and the administration was forceful about its rights and viable income. It did seem to be an entirely different approach from the Trust in the past which was essential for the survival of the department. We made a profit, the musicians profited and it was artistically satisfying. The Tokyo Dome, referred to as the Big Egg, has an egg shaped dome which spirals open at the top. It seats 55,000. It is a sporting arena but for *Aida* there was a similar set up to Sydney, with a stage across one end and the orchestra in front with the audience in a circle in the stands. There was a huge attendance, it sold very well for the three performances. I rarely had the opportunity to sit in on the performance; there was much to manage backstage. We looked after all arrangements including providing a briefing sheet for the musicians with a summary of the schedule as well as advice how to behave in Japan and customs to be aware of. There were 93 instruments carried onto the plane; valued at \$954,000. The Trust covered the insurance and instrument owners felt comfortable, particularly as there were a couple of famous Italian instruments; a valuable *Guarneri* played by the leader; and some A (Arthur) E (Edward) Smith

violins. This was detailed on the International Carnet which has to be prepared for customs when travelling overseas. I had known about this from tours with Fonteyn in England when we went into Europe. Crossing borders without a carnet, which has to contain serial numbers, make, and value of items, such as musical instruments, can create serious problems. The information needed to be correct for both Australian and Japanese Customs, particularly as we had our own special flight and were not subject to standard customs procedures. When we departed Australia, Customs had the information but did not carry out an inspection or document the process. After landing, we were greeted by our Japanese hosts who wanted to get us onto coaches and into the city. Through an interpreter, Kevin (an Australian travelling with me who spoke Japanese), I explained we needed Japanese Customs to stamp forms allowing the instruments in so that on exit we would not be faced with export duty or import duty when we landed back in Australia. An hour later we were still talking; I had held up the buses and our hosts were getting nervous, a little bit angry. Kevin understood the traditional, hierarchical ways of negotiation in Japan. He suggested he and Peter Maloney talk to the Customs official, while I (as the senior Australian official), and the senior Japanese Customs officer, stayed in the background. He also advised the necessity of taking gifts. We had a dozen bottles of *Chivas Regal* scotch and a box of toy koala bears for such moments. With two bottles of *Chivas* he began some very formal negotiations with a great deal of bowing. We had reached the senior level of Import Customs clearance at Narita Airport, Tokyo. One bottle of scotch was presented and politely accepted. There was much talk of 'understanding' and satisfying requirements with documentation. Subsequently, I sat down with the head officer and another bottle of scotch was presented. Eventually he signed the carnet and the buses took us to the hotel. I was very grateful for my earlier experience of international travel with musicians and instruments; a large import duty fee on return to Australia would have ruined the experience. We used all our scotch supply as polite gifts as we negotiated ways through rehearsals and other issues. We learnt not to be a bull at the gate. It ensured that everyone paid attention to their little list of what they could or could not do in Japan. The importance of body language: 'Scratching the head is a way of hiding confusion or embarrassment'; travelling on the train: 'Unless you want the experience, do not do it at five o'clock as there are official pushers to



1. *Aida* in Tokyo, orchestral rehearsal.
2. The audience entering the Tokyo Dome.
3. Just before the overture!

push you into the train,' and so on. There were many positives from this tour for the Trust. We were there during an international Musicians' Union convention. The Australian representative attending was the Sydney secretary with whom I had been negotiating for five years on the Opera Ballet award. We met, along with his Japanese counterpart, and he advised that word was coming back from the convention of an Australian orchestra of the highest repute playing for *Aida* in the Big Egg, which he considered was an excellent ambassador for Australia. People were impressed by the rehearsals as we had not performed at that stage. It went well and was managed smoothly because we had all the control.

On our return, negotiations began for a return trip and a recording of *Aida*, as well as *Carmen* at the Sydney Football Stadium. I was offered an attractive job with the International Opera Festival;



The Elizabethan Sinfonietta playing under the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall 'doughnuts' for the *Mr Donut* Concert.

double my salary plus expenses but it meant living in Los Angeles and negotiating with Canadian and American Musicians' Unions for a performance in San Francisco and later in Italy. Being aware of the company's reputation and disputes with the union in Canada, I was wary. For Tokyo, dancers had come from Canada and only accommodation and fares were paid before the performances, so the dancers had no money until after the performances. I did not want to work for a management who acted that way, so declined the offer. Regrettably, a few months later the Trust ceased to operate and with it ceased *Australian Orchestral Enterprises* and the possibility for *Carmen*. The timing for this orchestra and the freelance initiative was good but not so for the Trust. We needed financial support, something the Trust could not provide and I was not inclined to approach funding bodies for support. We had good years in 1988 and 1989, brought in a lot of income and balanced the books. We were the only department to deliver a profit,

of \$50,000 from orchestral activities, to the Trust in the last year of its operation. This was mostly from the production of *Aida*.

Another musical event we were involved with was the *Mr Donut* Twentieth Anniversary Concert at the Sydney Opera House. *Mr Donut* was a Japanese company with many franchise holders in Australia who came together for a big convention of 2,000 delegates talking doughnuts. This private event was very appropriately held in the Concert Hall where there were huge acoustic doughnut type rings suspended above the stage to help the sound quality. Takashi Asahina, conductor of the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra, was invited to Australia to conduct an orchestra with a program of western and Japanese music, including his arrangements of folk music. He made me a gift of the score for these pieces when he left. The orchestra played very well as usual. There were three Japanese soloists including Japan's foremost *shakuhachi* player, a *fue* (flute) player and a *koto* (long zither) player. I had never heard these instruments before. They were very effective and the western sound he had arranged behind them was quite beautiful and successful.



Conductor Takashi Asahina in action with the Elizabethan Sinfonietta.

As well as the orchestra, we hired organist David Drury¹⁴. After a couple of rehearsals, we gave two or three performances for the convention, which took place over a couple of days. The musicians were comfortable with the music and the conductor. It appeared to be well-received but it was difficult to know with Japanese audiences, particularly in this corporate situation, whether they enjoyed the musical message or were just being polite. The Japanese folk song arrangements were superb and the melodies were lovely. The soloists played authentically, but also matched the western sound. The orchestra had a great sense of satisfaction and musical achievement; an interesting experience for them. We have a western tradition where the orchestra goes on stage, sits and tunes briefly. Then the leader/concertmaster stands in front and formally tunes the orchestra as an assurance they are ready and in tune. A formal routine. He sits, the conductor comes on. The Japanese had taken over the Opera House staff and had two personnel alongside each Opera House staff member: over-management. The Japanese were there to do as they were told. There was no initiative to be taken. As manager of the orchestra I was given the running sheet for the day down to the last second. It was well-orchestrated and they were adamant about sticking to it. In the arts anything can happen and it does. To get sixty-odd people on stage is a big ask, especially when the organizers do not speak English. The orchestra had been briefed but the Japanese manager had not noted the leader's tuning up before the conductor entered. So while the orchestra was waiting quietly for its leader, the Japanese crew was about to send the conductor on stage. The principal Japanese stage manager did not speak English and was confused and annoyed when I said the leader must go first. I had to stand in front of the conductor hoping not to cause a diplomatic incident. He was friendly, affable and used to working with western orchestras, so he knew the procedure, but was not prepared to intervene against the organization. Everyone had their role: his was to conduct the orchestra. I got the leader on stage, followed by the conductor, and all was well. The audience was not aware of what was happening backstage and in retrospect it was funny, but it was taken very seriously. Afterwards there was a meeting and no doubt someone's head rolled.

At the end of 1989 we had a gross income of \$527,000. None of the costs were supported by public monies. From the income, 65% went to musicians' salaries, 26% to administrative overheads, 6% to production costs and 3% to publicity and promotion. The focus was getting the show up and running and paying musicians to keep them available. It showed we could go forward but we needed better publicity resources which I hoped might be possible through sponsorship. I wrote to some 100 of the top 200 companies registered in Sydney with a call to help. The response was encouraging but we needed an experienced fundraiser to find out how these people might help us. I was prepared to be completely flexible on what we could offer

¹⁴ David Drury (1961-), Australian musician, former organist St James Church, Sydney, has released four solo recordings. Since 1992 Director of Music, St Paul's College, University of Sydney.

but a fundraiser was not something the Trust could cover. We all know now it takes years to get proper funding support from the corporate and private sector. We continued responding to any possible engagements, trying to capitalize on what we had already achieved, but we were coming to the end of the award negotiation and the transfer of the Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra, with little time to generate new work.

The Elizabethan Philharmonic Orchestra finally transferred on 31st December 1989, eventually becoming the Opera Australia Orchestra. I remember being very physically and emotionally tired. There was a sense of relief that I would no longer lose sleep over it and a weight lifted from my shoulders. There were other positive challenges ahead. The Trust was based in Regent Street, Chippendale, a two-story L-shape complex, with three different buildings and a central courtyard parking area. The main building, facing Regent Street, was an old Victorian house, accommodating the Finance department and Director's office. There was a stand-alone rectangular building, housing the Membership department and Australian Content until it moved to the main block. Opposite, making the other end of the L-shape, was a two-story building with a big room at the top, which I occupied. Initially it housed the Sydney Orchestra files and material. After its transfer, I worked there on *Orchestral Enterprises* and the Shakespeare Project. There was storage underneath where everything from Dowling Street had been placed; some forty years of Trust history, part of the archive we have today. There was also a small boardroom and kitchen. The boardroom was used frequently: where many good and bad decisions were made by the Directors. The decision to go into administration was made there, but it was also the room where we put together Bell Shakespeare. This building had been occupied by Neville Wran¹⁵, and although quite modest compared with the Dowling Street building, it was properly equipped.

The last date for the orchestra was *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1990. Mike Batt, an English conductor/writer/composer and arranger, had taken the Lewis Carroll story and set it to music for a large orchestra of about 74 players, which included a rhythm section consisting of a rock 'n roll style guitarist, a drummer and bass. He had written, very successfully, a 1980s rock guitar sound into a classical score, doing what the Japanese had done with the *Mr Donut* program, putting two unrelated musical forces together. There was a very good guitarist from Melbourne who did the Sydney dates, sitting with a highly disciplined classical orchestra, being free and open with his solos. Musically, there were some tremendously interesting moments for lateral thinkers. If only interested in classical music, this was not for you, but if you were open to the story and could open your ears to a sound rather than a genre of music, this was a great show. We had two or three rehearsals and it came together very quickly. It was performed by the Elizabethan Sinfonietta at the Hills Centre and later in Melbourne without our involvement. There was no formal ending of

¹⁵ Labor Premier NSW 1976-1986.



MIKE BATT'S
THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK
BASED ON LEWIS CARROLL'S EPIC NONSENSE POEM

Starring
**CAMERON DADDO
 JACKIE LOVE
 DOUG PARKINSON
 PHILIP QUAST
 DARYL SOMERS
 JOHN WATERS
 DAVID WHITNEY**

and
**THE ELIZABETHAN
 SINFONIETTA**

Conducted by MIKE BATT

**Choreographed by
 JO-ANNE ROBINSON**

**SYDNEY SEASON
 OCTOBER 1990**

**Presented by
 JACKSON-MAYO
 PRODUCTIONS**

this orchestra; we just did not book them anymore. Even today, we could find a similar orchestra that would do exactly the same thing. The feature of the Sinfonietta was its consistency. The calibre of the players was such that everything would be consistent. Their capacity to bring something up very fast on one or two calls was high given their individual skill level. I would love to see someone take that concept, run with it and make something from it, but it does require commitment. It is not the sort of thing you would do only for the money, nor could you do it with subsidy, if there were too many questions as to why material was presented.

Also, I had been working on a retraining program for musicians, to be run at the National Institute of Dramatic Art as a NIDA initiative. It had support from the ABC and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. It had always been our policy to sit younger players next to more experienced players in the orchestra as a way of creating a feeling of youthful exuberance at the same time as control and

maturity. We were always thinking of ways to help musicians develop within and outside the orchestra, but I did not have anything further to do with it as I had a new demander of my time: I began to study law. I was not proud of my school academic record. My father had been a musician but at the end of his life wanted one of his sons to take up law. My brother George is a fine pure mathematician. Having been a loose cannon, I felt it was time to rectify the mistakes of my youth and do some study. Working at the Trust with the Elizabethan Sinfonietta, it was important to have legal documents in place for industrial advocacy and I learnt the necessity to negotiate and make agreements in writing. I had learnt a non-written agreement was as important and enforceable, although harder to do so. I was developing musical activity which required contracting and dealing with people who were notorious in contracting in a way favourable to them at the expense of others. I knew I had to understand the law involved. In the first year of developing the Sinfonietta, the Trust was pulling back on expenses and the last thing I could do was to go to the Trust lawyer for draft contracts for eight or nine different shows. It seemed I should become skilled in this, prompting me to begin part-time study. I was accepted into the part-time law course at University of Technology, Sydney, in mid-1989. By then I was about to wrap up my involvement with the Trust, so this was an opportunity to put more time into study. It took me nine years part-time. By the time I had completed three semesters, the signs were clear at the Trust that there was no future there for me. During the second semester I began contract law and realized what a minefield I had been walking through, a vindication of my decision to study law. Study began at 6pm three nights a week, plus assignments. It was one of the hardest things I ever took on, but one of the most rewarding. It was really satisfying when I finished the course and had beaten the natural attrition list. One professor, a barrister from London, had a senior position in the law school and gave an introductory welcome to students. There were about 220 new students, all working full or part-time, mostly mature age. He made a very sobering statement to the effect that by the time the course was finished (if we finished), we will have done one or all of three things: changed your relationship, moved home, changed your job. All three happened to me.

