

## COMPOSER INTERVIEW

# Eclectic Experience—Eclectic Style: An Interview with Joseph Twist

*Peter Campbell*

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Joseph Twist grew up in Queensland, and undertook composition studies with major Australians artists including Philip Bracanin, Richard Mills, Graeme Koehne and Nigel Butterley, leading to the award of a PhD from University of Queensland in 2009. He is an experienced performer and composer of vocal and instrumental concert music, as well as jazz and film music. He studied screen composition at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in Sydney, and received a scholarship to study jazz piano at the Dartington International Summer School. His works have been published by Morton Music in Australia and Hinshaw Music in the United States. Twist's output includes choral, instrumental and theatre works and he continues to receive commissions from a range of sources, including the Australia Council for the Arts. He has produced arrangements for David Hobson and Teddy Tahu Rhodes, as well as works for Gondwana Choirs and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. His film work includes the orchestral score to Brendon McDonall's acclaimed short film *The Law*, which was screened at the Dungog Film Festival, Sydney Children's Festival and Flickerfest.

Twist won the Chanticleer Composition Competition in 2003, and he is also the recipient of the Australian Voices Young Composer Award and the Gondwana Voices Young Composer

Award. He was a winning finalist in the Cybec 21st Century Composer Program, and his *Lamentation of Jeremiah* won first place in the 15th International Choral Festival 'Days of Sacred Music Cro Patria' Competition 2011. In 2008 he was composer-in-residence with the Sydney Children's Choir, and in 2010 he received a commission from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for *I Dance Myself to Sleep*, which was performed in their Metropolis series during 2011. The piano version of this work is discussed in the 'Composition' section of this issue, which follows the Interview.



**PC: You have been successful in the past few years in gaining commissions for choral works, notably for the Gondwana National Choral School, the Consort of Melbourne, Sola Voce Chamber Choir and the Sydney Chamber Choir. What elements of your compositional style make your work particularly appealing to choirs?**

JT: I think choirs are drawn to my work for three reasons: practicality, individuality and versatility. I tend to write idiomatically not only for each vocal ensemble but also for the particular artistic requirements of the event for which the work is commissioned. The ability to write music that is accessible and practical for the musicians *as well* as the audience is an obvious pre-requisite of any composer and many of the greatest composers are renowned for their ability to achieve such practicality in their writing: Benjamin Britten would be a good twentieth-century example. However, achieving such practical accessibility for performers while also endeavouring to create a unique musical experience for the audience, possibly with an intriguing extra-musical concept, can be very difficult. Unique sounds and innovative concepts are a fascinating trait of any new piece of music, but for me the aim is to incorporate elements of 'innovation' through a language that is in no way abstruse. I prefer to communicate directly with audiences by adopting a musical language that is recognisable, sometimes full of pastiche and allusion, but now in the context of a completely new piece. Therefore, my own overarching technique is one of synthesis and extension—finding a way to synthesise several musical ideas that may come from different backgrounds or traditions so that the new work is unique, creative, individual, as well as accessible and practical. I think it's these elements of my music that choirs, as well as instrumental ensembles, find appealing.

Also, the unique artistic requirements of each commission allow me to draw on my eclectic musical interests. For example, the Consort of Melbourne required me to draw on sacred Renaissance music, as did Sola Voce, but combined with a kind of Manhattan Transfer/Idea of North jazz influence. Sydney Chamber Choir required a work that was directly related to Bach's great double choir motet *Singet dem Herrn ein Neues Lied*. The Gondwana Choral School required a score for piano, percussion and about five large choirs singing simultaneously, but I also wanted to express something that was uniquely Australian, linking the idea of 'perpetual light' (*Lux aeterna*) with the intense and unremitting sunlight in Queensland. I therefore utilised several musical devices common to my language to portray this experience—jazz harmonies, cluster writing that often expands from a single note and other experimental vocal effects and scoring techniques. I think it's the versatility and practicality demonstrated by these works that people like.

**PC: Is the compositional process for choirs and for orchestras different? How does being a singer yourself change the process?**

JT: Yes, it is different, but you can apply some of the same techniques. 'Orchestrating' for choir is obviously a different process to orchestrating for instrumentalists. However, I believe my experience in writing for choirs, with its focus on voice-leading and resonance, has improved my skills as an orchestrator, and has influenced the musical style and overall sound-world of my orchestral works. I enjoy the craft of orchestration thoroughly—particularly creating unique textures and colours through unusual instrumental combinations and different kinds of 'extended' playing techniques, and the challenge of creating orchestral gestures within the practical boundaries of the instruments. In doing so, I attempt to write idiomatically for each instrument as they contribute individually to the sound as a whole. I have received feedback, even with regard to my film scores, that my melodic writing and voice leading suggest the influence of my vocal music background. I have consciously (and probably sub-consciously) adopted idiosyncrasies of medieval plainchant when constructing melodies for orchestral works. Plainchant is a fascinating musical tradition, with its sense of seamless melodic flow, lack of any obvious repetition and the fluid rhythmic character governed by the articulation of Latin syllables rather than strict metric pulsation. When I write leaps in my own melodies I will often follow them by some stepwise movement in the opposite direction—a common trait in plainchant, documented in Renaissance treatises by Zarlino and others.

**PC: Last year, you were the composer-in-residence for Gondwana Voices. How is a residency different from regular composition?**

JT: The main difference is that a residency allows a greater level of collaboration with a musical ensemble. During my residencies with Gondwana Voices and the Sydney Children's Choir I collaborated closely with the conductors and, most importantly, the young singers in each choir. New music by Australian composers written specifically for, and often developed in collaboration with, the children of the choir is an important part of Gondwana's distinctive music education methodology, which fosters an appreciation of Australian music in young people.

**PC: There is a clear influence of jazz in some of the works. What is your background, and what particular elements are successful in such crossover?**

JT: My background in jazz has always been a sideline to my 'contemporary classical' and film music work. It started out as a curious fascination with different aspects of jazz and I began teaching myself jazz piano as a hobby by listening to recordings, reading books on jazz harmony and then reading through jazz standards in my spare time, as well as playing in some bands. I have always been inclined to improvise when I play the piano, so an interest in jazz seemed natural to me. A number of conventions in jazz harmony greatly influence my composing style, many of which are related to techniques from the classical tradition. I find jazz techniques very useful in my film scores and arrangements, where it is sometimes necessary to write in an accessible and familiar musical style. The influence of jazz—sometimes subtle, sometimes overt—is, however, also evident in many of my concert works. One of my most significant instrumental chamber works, *Le Tombeau de Monk*, written in homage to the eccentric jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, is an obvious example.

**PC: Would you consider yourself to be a ‘postmodern’ composer? In what ways does this term fit with your style, aesthetic or practice?**

JT: Maybe. In my experience the term ‘postmodern’ is used very liberally and equivocally. In fact I’ve been so confused by this multivalent word that I’ve read a few articles attempting to elucidate its meaning and its relevance in music. Jonathan D. Kramer, for example, describes postmodernism as a ‘maddeningly imprecise musical concept,’ and I tend to agree. He goes on to describe a distinction between musical ‘postmodernism’ and ‘anti-modernism’: anti-modernism exhibits a ‘yearning for the golden ages of classicism and romanticism and perpetuates the elitism of art music,’ whereas postmodernism ‘claims to be “anti-elitist.”’<sup>1</sup> Yet the Australian composer Graeme Koehne, who has described himself as ‘anti-modernist,’ has spoken out many times against elitism in art music and the ‘inflated pretension of much “contemporary classical” music’.<sup>2</sup> The discourse I have read about postmodernism in music describes many subjective and sometimes conflicting tenets associated with the term. Moreover, identifying a specific period or composer with postmodernism is problematic. Also, when trying to identify its stylistic idiosyncrasies, broad generalisations are often made. One may deduce that musical postmodernism possibly begins with 1960s minimalism which, among other things, is seen as a reaction to post-war aesthetics of increased musical complexity and as an attempt to ‘bridge the gap’ between composer and audience (perhaps the antithesis to Milton Babbitt’s *Composer as Specialist / Who Cares if you Listen?*). But to me, this seems too convenient to be true. It reflects a narrow-minded and conveniently linear view of music history and artistic development rather than the extreme diversity of musical styles that exist simultaneously and often overlap throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Additionally, from what I have read, postmodern features can be identified in music as early as Ives, Mahler and Nielsen,<sup>3</sup> further blurring any presumed lineage and cogent stylistic identification of musical postmodernism.

Despite the ambiguity of the terminology and its connotations, it is nevertheless worthwhile trying to identify my own relationship to postmodernism as a composer. I don’t like the idea of labelling myself as ‘anti’ anything, particularly when it comes to art, so I wouldn’t call myself an ‘anti-modernist.’ There are, however, several aspects of my work that could be described as ‘postmodern’. For example, I am conscious about writing in a style that communicates directly with audiences, and using an accessible musical language that sometimes incorporates an ironic use of musical allusion and pastiche.

Overall, I prefer to associate myself with a kind of ‘democratic’ attitude to musical style and aesthetics. Due to my eclectic musical interests and activities I like to find inspiration in music from various sources and I ultimately agree with Gunther Schuller that ‘all musics are created equal.’<sup>4</sup> I believe that any musical style possesses value and potential, whether it be the wonderfully complex serial-based music of Brian Ferneyhough, the bizarre kaleidoscope of changing textures in music by Giacinto Scelsi, the catchy smash-hit of Lady Gaga or the

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan D. Kramer, ‘The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism,’ *Postmodern Music / Post Modern Thought*, ed. Judy Lochhead (New York/London: Routledge, 2002) 13.

<sup>2</sup> James Koehne, ‘Composing Freestyle,’ liner notes to *Graeme Koehne: Inflight Entertainment*, perf. Diana Doherty, Takuo Yuasa, Sydney Symphony, Naxos CD 8.555847, 2004, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Kramer, ‘Musical Postmodernism,’ 16.

<sup>4</sup> Gunther Schuller, ‘Third Stream Revisited,’ *Musings* (New York: OUP, 1986) 119–20.

wonderfully crafted Broadway musical of Stephen Sondheim. Of course there is music that is not to my taste, but I try to recognise that this is a value judgement. Sometimes, if I can just open my mind, I surprise myself by how much I can grow to like music I once disliked.

For me, a unique synthesis of various musical interests is what can lead to an individual musical style. I don't think I'm always successful in achieving this 'unique synthesis' and my music could often be seen as being derivative, but this isn't something that bothers me—I'm just not focussed on creating something that is distinctly original, and I would argue that complete originality is something that is rarely achieved in art. I agree with George Rochberg's claim that 'the ring of authenticity is more important than the clang of originality.'<sup>5</sup> I would argue that even when music is perceived to be derivative, this does not preclude artistry, technical finesse or the emotional impact it can have on audiences. I'm interested in creating something that is authentic, accessible and expressive, which hopefully reflects the diversity of my musical interests. But if I can also create something that is truly original, or maybe just a bit original, then I would be very happy with my work. I'm not sure if I've achieved this yet, or if I ever will, but it's worth trying and these aspirations are what sustain my passion to continue honing my craft.

Such negative value judgements get in the way of a 'democratic' appreciation of musical styles. I don't think anyone should try to pretend they like music that doesn't appeal to them—that would be silly and it would be *inauthentic*. However, we live in a world where you can walk twenty metres from a church where the choir is singing Renaissance polyphony to a nightclub playing the best trance music. I believe a composer who does not appreciate this diversity is, in effect, living in a vacuum. They are missing the potential for significant personal and musical development that is attained by having an open mind.

So, if any of what I am describing here relates somehow to postmodernism, then I suppose you might consider me a postmodernist composer.

**PC: In your recent commissions for the Consort of Melbourne you were asked specifically for works inspired by or related to the Renaissance composer Victoria. How did you approach this project?**

JT: It is an honour for a living composer to pay tribute to a significant musical forebear, particularly one whose legacy has been sustained for four hundred years. Victoria's works are full of outstanding musical elements from which to draw inspiration, rich with wonderful arching phrases and ingenious part writing. Many of my compositions, including my orchestral works and film scores, exhibit a fascination with musical allusion and pastiche, and my works for 'Victoria with a Twist' demonstrate a similar compositional methodology.<sup>6</sup> Many sixteenth-century composers paid homage to pre-existing music by way of 'parody' or 'imitation', and I endeavoured to adopt a similar technique in my own *Lamentation of Jeremiah*, literally quoting parts of Victoria's Lamentations throughout. Similarly, my compositions *Hombres Victoria*, *Victoria!* and *Versa est in luctum*, also written for this concert series, utilise material from Victoria's *Missa Pro Victoria* and the requiem mass, *Officium Defunctorum*, respectively. In

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<sup>5</sup> George Rochberg, 'On the Third String Quartet,' *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Oliver Stunk (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) 1508.

<sup>6</sup> During 2011, the Consort of Music presented a series of concerts entitled 'Victoria with a Twist' in which works by Victoria were paired with works I wrote as companion pieces.

addition to simply quoting Victoria, echoes of Victoria's part-writing are found throughout the thematic and harmonic material of these new works, combined with more modern influences including repetitive minimalist textures and harmonic language drawn from the music of Steve Reich, Jonathan Dove, Arvo Pärt and James MacMillan.

**PC: We know Victoria primarily as a church composer. What is your attitude to religious composition?**

JT: In my opinion, a lot of the best choral music stems from a religious tradition. Western sacred music is a very long and rich musical tradition from which to draw inspiration—as are other musical and religious traditions. Although I'm not a religious person, I've been involved with sacred music as both a composer and a singer, working for many vocal ensembles, including church choirs, and I've received a lot of support from church communities for new works, which I appreciate very much!

I believe that there is a great deal of history, culture, literature, art, music and convention associated with all religions. Appreciating this culture and drawing inspiration from centuries of composers, painters and writers can only be good for the development of new art, even in the twenty-first century, when the relevance of religion is continually questioned. There are many wonderful stories, poems and fables associated with religion, which are a source of continual fascination and inspiration for me. In my opinion, acknowledging sacred art need not deny any oppression or hardship caused by religion. Even the most strident atheist should recognise that religion permeates so much of our culture and history, and understanding history and convention through art may actually assist in the reconciliation of ideological tensions and promote tolerance. There are numerous examples of cross cultural, sacred works that have this quality. Paul Stanhope's wonderful *Exile Lamentations* springs to mind—a deftly written work combining many apposite musical influences and promoting a wonderfully idealistic message of peace and reconciliation in Palestine.

I therefore have no qualms setting sacred texts to music, and I greatly enjoy combining them with other texts or musical ideas from other traditions. My Gondwana Voices work *Benedicto*, for example, uses a traditional Catholic blessing in Latin in the context of Latin American and Samba rhythms and pentatonic modes. To me, this kind of fusion reflects the cultural diversity of the twenty-first century and a positive attitude to learning from religion, rather than focusing on any negative connotations.

**PC: You have named Philip Bracanin, Richard Mills, Graeme Koehne and Nigel Butterley as your compositional mentors. Can you detail your musical training and place each of these fine Australians in your development?**

JT: Philip Bracanin was my first composition teacher, and I learned from him for many years. I learned a great deal from Philip—most significantly I developed an appreciation of shape and direction in my work, and how to sustain an audience's attention over a long period of time, sometimes with very limited musical material. Harmonic direction and tension, slow and subtle changes in texture, and variation techniques are just some ways of achieving this. However Philip mostly encouraged me to develop a technique either by manipulating motivic relationships in my thematic language, perhaps akin to Brahms or Sibelius, or by striving for a kind of Wagnerian 'endless melody.' These techniques contribute to musical flow and direction,



rather than composing with constantly changing textures and static harmony. I was writing music that was influenced by various film composers, often exhibiting dramatic changes of musical texture or tempo, perhaps a little like certain works of Stravinsky, and I think Philip was identifying a technique that was lacking in my music and encouraging me to work on it. In attaining this appreciation of 'musical flow' I looked not only at the thematic development and melodic writing of composers like Brahms, Sibelius, Richard Strauss, Wagner, but I also drew inspiration from the aspects of plainchant mentioned above. I also looked at the influence of plainchant on composers like Messiaen and Debussy, as well as the use of folk music in Greig, Holst and other English composers. I became fascinated with and inspired by the subtle differences in thematic development of many composers. It is also intriguing to contrast the more rigorous approach of thematic development of Brahms and Sibelius with the more 'non-developmental' melodic writing of Debussy or Ralph Vaughan Williams, for example.

Richard Mills is also a very significant mentor for me. I have participated in numerous composer development programs with Richard, and he has provided extremely generous support and wisdom for me for a number of years. In particular, I have been very lucky to watch Richard pull apart pieces from the standard repertoire with a live orchestra in very comprehensive orchestration tutorials. Together with attending orchestral concerts and rehearsals after having closely studied the scores, this was formative in learning the craft of orchestration.

Graeme Koehe is a composer for whom I have a great deal of respect and admiration, and I am extremely grateful for his support and encouragement. More than anything, Graeme encouraged me to embrace my love of different styles of music and to be unabashed in my incorporation of any kind of music in my concert works. I remember Graeme describing how he once encouraged a student of his to incorporate musical elements from their favourite music outside of the classical tradition, in this case Coldplay and The Prodigy. That story really hit home for me; I subsequently started incorporating things like jazz harmonies, Latin American rhythms, and film-music clichés into my music, and I stopped feeling embarrassed about it. The overt influence of film music on Graeme's own compositions encouraged me not to worry about my concert music sounding 'cinematic'. I now see this influence as positive rather than negative, and I shrug off value judgements directed at the filmic aspects of my concert works.

Since moving to Sydney I have been mentored by Nigel Butterley, who is also an extremely encouraging and inquisitive teacher. Nigel provided a lot of support while I was writing *I Dance Myself to Sleep* for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. His genius as a composer and a pianist was very helpful for this, as this work exists in both solo piano and orchestral versions. Nigel also encouraged me to develop my rhythmic language, to incorporate more intricacy and contrast through my use of rhythm—an element of my language that I am continuing to hone.

**PC: More broadly, who are your composer heroes? What do you admire about or learn from each of them?**

JT: I find it very difficult to choose just a few musical heroes. I'm someone who has an equal love of Hans Zimmer and Alan Menken, Victoria and Ockeghem, and John Coltrane and Chick Corea, making it hard to single out a particularly influential composer or a group of composers.

Nevertheless, it was my fascination with the film music of one particular composer—John Williams—that sparked my musical development. As an Australian, born in the 1980s, the earliest music that I found inspiring came through popular culture, particularly film scores, such as *Superman*, *Star Wars* and *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*. In particular, these film scores inspired an interest in orchestral music, as well as the practise of developing musical themes and motives: I could go on for hours about the fantastic use of leitmotif in the *Star Wars* saga. I later realised that this music drew on established conventions of classical composition, but used in new and exciting ways. This was to have a lasting effect on my development as a composer. I believe it also inspired me to try to create entertaining and easily accessible music for wide audiences.

As I came to discover the classical tradition through piano lessons, composition lessons, choral singing and many other musical activities, I became enamoured with the work of many other composers, from Fairfax to Gesualdo, Bach to Berio, whatever. I also became fascinated with discovering of the origin of John Williams's fantastic musical ideas and I grew to appreciate his very clever use of pastiche. I believe that Williams's own individual voice is heard clearly even when he is writing pastiche, and I hope to work towards achieving this myself.

I should also mention some of my favourite jazz musicians and composers. As a pianist I've always been more of an 'improviser' than a 'reader', which is why I tend to play in bands and shows rather than do accompaniment or repetiteur work (I am in fact a terrible piano sight-reader!). I suppose my father's interest in traditional jazz, as well as the encouragement of some of my school music teachers lead me to embrace jazz piano. Since then I've been very lucky to learn from some amazing jazz musicians, particularly in England, including Pete Churchill, Nikki Iles, Lewis Riley and Keith Tippet, who is also a fantastic concert composer and 'free' improviser. Furthermore, the harmonic and rhythmic language of jazz has provided ample inspiration for me. Bill Evans's piano style has inspired a generation of jazz pianists and I believe that understanding his playing techniques on a music-theory level can greatly enrich a composer's understanding of harmony. Other significant jazz masters for me have ranged from Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, John Coltrane to Miles Davis, and I continue to discover inspiring recordings by many new artists today.

**PC: Film music has always been viewed as somewhat different from mainstream classical composition. In what ways is this true?**

JT: There are many challenges scoring films—communicating with and understanding directors and producers, suiting your own style and experience to the needs of a film, knowing when to underscore subtly and when to write freely—which all depend on the peculiarities of the project. So far, I've had very fruitful experiences scoring for film, and I think this is because of my fastidiousness in choosing which films, TV shows and video games to score. My greatest experience in film scoring happened recently when I scored Brendon McDonall's charming short film *The Law*. I was very inspired by the film and I also felt that I was attuned to the artistic values of Brendon, who I met as a student at AFTRS. Brendon was fantastic to work with. He was essentially looking for 'touches of Gershwin and the theme from *Rugrats*,' so I felt I had the musical vocabulary to compliment the film. The job also included a studio recording with a live professional string orchestra, which I conducted, so it was the kind of film that was perfect for me to score.



Generally, I prefer to write scores with real instruments. Although I enjoy using samples, I prefer to incorporate at least some kind of acoustic sound, even if it's my own voice. Since moving to Sydney two years ago I've also enjoyed orchestrating and arranging music for film scores and live events. In fact, I would rather orchestrate the music of another composer for a high-budget film than write music for a film where an orchestra isn't required. My hero John Williams describes the need for film composers to be 'chameleon-like' and emphasises the importance of versatility. But in some cases it would be better for the director to hire someone else. If a director specifically needs electronic dance music, as much as I love this music, I don't create it and I wouldn't know how.

Film music has sometimes been perceived as inferior to mainstream classical composition—a value judgement that I don't agree with. Williams attests to this prejudice: 'if you go back to the '30s, writing for movies was something most serious composers wouldn't have any truck with.'<sup>7</sup> Although I'm sure you could point to film scores that were of poor quality and identify reasons why, it's often unfair to compare the two mediums. Sometimes a simple, subtle, well-timed score is the most appropriate, and of course simplicity does not negate the genius of the work. Attitudes have, however, begun to change. Film scores have provided inspiration for works conceived for the concert hall, including my own works. As Graeme Koehne explains:

Even in some of the most standard movie genres, there is inventive and innovative music which deserves to be admired and studied. In fact, there is often more skill, technique and imagination to be found in the work of these composers ... than in the inflated pretension of much 'contemporary classical' music.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, film composers today are less likely to have come from the classical orchestral tradition than in the golden days of epic Eric Korngold and Max Steiner scores; there is perhaps more variety in the film music scene than in the world of new classical music. The 1999 film *Go*, for example, features a score comprised exclusively of dance and techno electronic music by BT, with subtle changes in beat and groove highlighting dramatic elements very sensitively. Many of my peers at AFTRS came from completely different musical backgrounds and each possessed the ability to imbue their distinct styles to the service of films in a very different way.

**PC: So is it easier to compose with such an extra-musical stimulus? How does one go about writing absolute or pure music?**

JT: I don't think it's easier, but it can help, depending on what the stimulus is. I enjoy composing to a brief. Whether it is for a film score, an opera libretto or music arrangements for an event, I enjoy writing in different styles of music, adjusting my vocabulary to suit the particular needs of the project. When I write a concert work with an extra-musical concept in mind, I approach the project in a similar way. However, I make more effort to ensure the musical ideas are homogenous when writing concert works than in film scores. For example, my score for *The Law* suddenly changes from a sweeping romantic swell to an amusing bossa-nova groove. The instrumentation changes completely—it sounds like a whole new piece of music

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<sup>7</sup> John Jurgensen, 'The Last Movie Maestro,' *Wall Street Journal*, 16 Dec. 2011, [online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203893404577098730827733806.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203893404577098730827733806.html).

<sup>8</sup> Koehne, 'Composing Freestyle' 4.

has taken over, but this isn't a problem and it can be very effective in film. In a concert work I like to utilise variety and contrast to highlight extra-musical elements, but I think concert works are more successful when these influences are somehow synthesised, rather than simply juxtaposed, and this assists in creating a clear musical journey, rather than a disjointed mosaic of contrasting styles with no sense of catharsis in the work.

Sometimes I feel as though there is a requirement in new works to attach some kind of extra-musical concept, or at least to have a title that directs the listener to think about something concrete, thereby associating the work's abstract sounds with some kind of pre-determined meaning. It seems as though it is taboo to simply write a 'Sonata' or a 'Fantasia' or 'Symphony No. 1', and if you do, the accompanying notes need to provide either a programmatic reference or to expound some kind of abstruse concept upon which the music is based. Composers generally come up with evocative, descriptive or programmatic titles for their compositions these days, and I must admit that I like to create these kinds of titles for my own works too. If a composer is to write a kind of 'study' piece, or 'pure' music, it is likely that they would write it in their spare time. It would be interesting to know how Stockhausen supported himself when writing *Study I* and *Study II*—purely electronic music that experiments with controlling changes in timbre, extending on serialism.

I don't think the tendency for composers to write music with extra-musical concepts or evocative titles is a problem, and I enjoy writing such music myself, but sometimes I just feel like writing music that is 'pure' and appreciated exclusively for its abstract sonic properties. Unfortunately, my recent years as a freelance composer have afforded very little opportunity to write this kind of music; I do hope to find time to write another 'fantasia' or 'sonata' soon, as I believe this assists in developing and maintaining one's compositional technique. I miss having the luxury of writing 'study' works, as I did during my student years, when it was not only encouraged but was required.

**PC: Having studied in Australia with Australian composers, do you think it is possible to talk about Australian music having an identifiable style? What is Australian about your music?**

JT: The idea of an 'Australian style' is too difficult to define, in my opinion—it's too subjective and perhaps completely unattainable. An 'Australian style' also seems very old-fashioned in the context of a diverse, multicultural, technology-rich twenty-first century society. There is so much wonderful diversity and eclecticism of musical style that exists inherently in art music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Australia that, to me, identifying one distinct style is almost impossible. Composers such as John Antill, Peter Sculthorpe and Stephen Leek have written music with a concerted interest in drawing inspiration from distinctly Australian elements, so they therefore have their own individual Australian *styles*, but I don't think there is a generalised 'Australian sound' exhibited by Australian composers as a whole.

I have, however, written pieces that on some level embrace distinctly Australian musical attributes or incorporate an Australian extra-musical concept. *Rain Dream* for Gondwana Voices tells the story of a child living in the Australian outback who has never seen rain, and *On the Night Train*, a choral setting of words by Henry Lawson, also uses musical word-painting devices to depict the Australian outback, but I don't think these examples exhibit any kind of generalised 'Australian style.'

Why doesn't an 'Australian style' exist? Perhaps it has something to do with Australia's inorganic history, where European culture was imposed upon the indigenous culture, eventually developing into a multicultural society. This perpetuates the difficulty of defining 'Australian style' in a diverse and eclectic array of simultaneously existing compositional musical voices. Furthermore, Australia's small population and its great distance from Europe and America have surely had an impact on our musical history and cultural development. Many of our earlier composers continued writing in an ostensibly European style—either an extension of late romanticism or European neoclassicism—until Antill and Sculthorpe created music that was clearly Australia inspired.

Of course, Australia could be compared with the United States where, conversely, a rich tradition of truly American classical music exists, with many contrasting compositional voices, ranging from Barber, Copeland, Henry Cowell and Charles Ives to Cage, Schuller, Glass, Reich, Adams, Corigliano and many others. As far back as Dvořák, classical composers have endeavoured to develop an American sound, but this did not happen as organically in Australia. Furthermore, over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, so many important European composers emigrated to the United States, greatly influencing composition in the area and cultivating the performance of new works, including Korngold, Varèse, Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky. Also, significant American composers such as Copeland were often in Europe for lessons, so the exchange between Europe and America was ongoing and fruitful. These factors, as well as a larger population and closer geographic proximity, make comparing America and Australia's classical music history unfair.

Toru Takemitsu's music embraces distinctly Japanese stylistic traits within the context of European classical music to generate a distinctly individual language. While there are many other examples of noteworthy composers with distinctive musical styles drawing on their cultural heritage, I think increasingly they are seen more as individual styles within a myriad of contrasting compositional voices, cross cultural influences and stylistic fusions. This diversity is a common factor of music making in the past hundred years (or more), and I'm sure this is likely to continue for a long time!

**PC: What, then, is your view of the state of classical music in Australia today?**

JT: I suppose I get the impression that many Australian musicians and music lovers believe that classical music does not receive the attention it deserves, and maybe they're right. It's worth asking why many Australians are familiar with the work of Sydney Nolan, Tim Winton, David Williamson or Oodgeroo Noonuccal, some of Australia's greatest visual artists, poets and playwrights, while they are unfamiliar with our own Australian composers of classical music. Australian composers such as Peter Sculthorpe or Brett Dean seem to be generally unknown to the wider public, particularly compared with artists from other disciplines. So, what can we do to raise the awareness of Australian classical music amongst the general public? I'm sure that many people have contemplated this issue before, but I suppose I can offer the following tentative observations (but I want to apologise for any presumptuousness in my remarks, and to reserve the right to withdraw these statements in the future, if necessary).

It seems to me that orchestral playing is fairly healthy in this country. The Australian Youth Orchestra fosters a fantastic cultural appreciation of classical music performance and

professional work is available in orchestras around the country, albeit competitive work I'm sure. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of vocal music, particularly ensemble-based vocal music (often referred to as 'choral' music, but I would also include 'consort' singing, which is different from opera-chorus singing). I think there are a number of reasons why there is a lack of vocal ensemble opportunities in Australia. Compared with the rich tradition that exists in Britain and the United States, where churches, university colleges and other organisations are a fantastic training ground for *real* professional opportunities, Australia offers almost nothing. I find this very surprising, considering how much interest and enthusiasm exists for amateur choral singing right around Australia. I don't know what the solution is, but I think that, somehow, choral music organisations need to combine, or new ones be established, to try to provide training opportunities *and* professional vocations for choral singers in this country, similar to that provided by the AYO and the professional orchestras. Gondwana Voices and other organisations are trying to do this, and to foster a cultural recognition of Australian music, yet, due to a lack of professional opportunities, the talented singers who emerge through these fine organisations either take their talents overseas, or become doctors, lawyers, teachers, whatever.

Perhaps it's unfair to compare choral organisations with orchestras—they are clearly inherently different and therefore require different kinds of administration. But I still think these organisations could learn from each other, in order to promote more professional opportunities and more cultural appreciation of Australian music in a constantly growing and increasingly diversifying Australian society.

**PC: The opportunities may not exist for choral performers, but what about for composers? Can one make a living?**

JT: Overall, I think the Australian new music scene has a lot to be proud of. There are many Australian composers who work in various disciplines and styles whose works are being performed by various ensembles around the country, but it can still be very difficult to be noticed as a composer. This may come through performances by a revered ensemble, or by gathering recognition for performances you have organised yourself. Contemporary Australian composers have to compete with canonic works from the classical tradition, as well as many fine composers from around the world whose music also deserves to be heard. Even though most of us still want to hear the great works of the classical 'giants,' I get the impression that many organisations, ensembles, and composers themselves are endeavouring to programme more Australian content, and I think this needs to continue.

I have been very lucky to take part in composer development programs with the Song Company, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Voices and Gondwana Voices, but I believe that much more could be done to programme new music by young Australian composers. In the case of orchestral music, it is understandable that performing music by young and emerging composers is tackled with some trepidation; writing for orchestra generally requires more technical development than writing for chamber and vocal ensembles, but this makes composer development programs particularly important. Orchestras in Melbourne and Tasmania seem to provide far more of these opportunities than other orchestras around the country, and I think it is a great shame that it does not happen across the board.

In my experience, vocal ensembles have shown a greater willingness to commission and perform new works by young composers—not only my own works, but works other young and emerging composers as well. I have attended many concerts by groups like the Song Company, Gondwana Voices, the Australian Voices and the National Youth Choir of Australia with exclusively Australian programs. It is, perhaps, a little easier for a vocal ensemble to commission a work by a young composer: less organisation of a large body of instrumentalists is required, and the technique of orchestration needs to be developed with time. I firmly believe, however, that the zeal for performing new works by young Australian composers exhibited by vocal ensembles emerges from their productive artistic values and administration. Gondwana Voices and Sydney Children's Choir, for example, endeavour to 'canonise' significant Australian composers by naming their various choral ensembles after them. My involvement with choirs and vocal ensembles has helped cultivate my work as a composer, and I believe that if this positive attitude towards new works by young and emerging Australians could be emulated by other orchestral and choral organisations around the country it would greatly encourage a wider cultural appreciation of Australian music, and would allow more works by young and emerging composers to be heard by audiences.