

SYMPOSIUM: CHORAL MUSIC IN MELBOURNE

Transcript of the Forum: The Present and Future of Choral Music in Melbourne

At the conclusion of the day-long Symposium on Choral Music in Melbourne, held at the University of Melbourne on 21 June 2003, a panel of experts drawn from various sectors of the music industry was convened under the chairmanship of ABC journalist Terry Lane. The panel was assembled by Rodney Wetherell, a member of the committee for the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic's 150th anniversary celebrations, with the advice and assistance of musicologist Dr Thérèse Radic. The panel consisted of:

Graham Abbott (GA), conductor

Susie Howie (SH), publicist

Clive O'Connell (CO), critic

Andrew Wailes (AW), conductor

Each member of the panel was to contribute a personal view on the topic of the current state and the future of choral music, from the perspective of their particular role in the industry. A period of discussion would ensue, and then each member of the panel would be available to answer questions and provide comment and feedback to the audience. The proceedings were recorded, and were later transcribed from tape by John Campbell. The text was edited by Jennifer Hill, Peter Campbell and Jessica Smith.

Terry Lane: The purpose of this session is to speculate about the future of choral music in general, but the future of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic in particular, and for the purpose of that speculation we have this panel of four distinguished contributors. On your right and my left are two gentlemen well known to the choir—Andrew Wailes, the Music Director (why am I telling you that; you know that) and Graham Abbott, who enjoys a very good working relationship with the choir as an occasional conductor. Immediately on my left is Clive O'Connell, who is the music critic for the *Age*—you can deal with him later—and Susie Howie, whose name might not necessarily be well known to you, but is certainly well known to me as a broadcaster. Susie is one of the most important and most sought after publicists for musical

events and groups in the country, as the Howie part of the Howie & Taylor publicity company. We are really tickled pink to have you here, Susie, because—how did Rodney Wetherell put it?—he said she said yes to our invitation because she was so surprised to be invited by us.

Susie Howie: I know how naughty Terry Radic can be!

TL: Presumably Susie does not normally deal with high-minded choral groups who would not be able to afford her. This is just by way of explanation, you understand.

The idea of this forum is that each contributor will speak for five minutes or six minutes—whatever their watch tells them is a reasonable time, because this is a quite long session that we have planned. After each of the individuals has given their vision of where choral music might go in the future, they might talk to each other for a while and then it is open for general participation by all of us to ask them questions about what might lie in the future for the Philharmonic Society. So thank you very much to all of you for being here and taking part in this event this afternoon. We might as well start with the Music Director of the Philharmonic, Andrew Wailes.

Andrew Wailes: Thank you, Terry, and thank you to my three friends and colleagues over here who have very kindly given up their afternoon to be with us. Thank you also all of you for being here to make this day important, productive and special, not only for the Philharmonic but for choral singing in Melbourne in general. As the rest of you know—I am telling you something you do know, but it is an important point—I am very privileged to work with all types of choirs from children of seven years right through to people in their seventies and eighties and in fact one person who is about to have a ninetieth birthday and has not missed a concert in about sixty years in one of my other community choirs. Within that spectrum I conduct groups ranging from small ensembles on a guest basis to international choirs—just last Wednesday evening I worked with an American choir—adult choirs at university level, tertiary choirs ranging from 130 or 140 voices at MUCS [the Melbourne University Choral Society] to quite small groups at the Melba Conservatorium or the Australian Catholic University (ACU), the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, of course, the Australian Children's Choir. They are all unique; they are all different. They all have their own challenges.

As someone working in the field, I am very keen to include a session such as this today to round off what has been a very stimulating and fascinating day covering mainly historical repertoire, if you like. I felt we needed to go somewhere; we need to take the past and move towards the future and discuss the present. All of those groups I have mentioned share several things. They share the problem of recruiting. Where do their members come from? How do they hear about the groups? How do they actually come to pluck up the courage to audition, or in fact know about the need to audition, or not to audition in some cases? Where do members go once they retire, if they do not go to one of my other choirs? That is a very personal perspective on things, but in a bigger picture it occurs to me that in Melbourne we have more children's choirs than the rest of Australia combined. We have literally hundreds and hundreds of choirs, if you include all the schools, many of which now have four, five, six or seven different choral ensembles, even up to ten in some of the large independent schools. Every year thousands of children are leaving school, many of whom were singing voluntarily in choirs at school. Conducting a youth choir—one of the few in Melbourne, the Melbourne

University Choral Society—I am always impressed by the large number of new members who start every year; but then when I actually analyse it, I think it is a very tiny number of people considering the huge numbers of student intake at Melbourne University and the vast numbers of singers who literally disappear or evaporate overnight. Where do they go? It is the same with orchestras; it is not related just to choirs. But that is an issue—recruitment—and especially the move between different levels of choirs—school choirs, children’s choirs, youth choirs, church choirs, and then adult choirs—there seems to be a void. From the age of seventeen or eighteen to the age of thirty-five or forty-five there are very few people participating proportionally in choral music in this city. Yet there is the interest. We know that because of the number of people who join small groups voluntarily and do go to intervarsity choral festivals and all the other things that happen around the country. But there is a reluctance, apparently, to commit to a choir. That is an issue—commitment. How can we make people more committed? Why should we; why shouldn’t we?

The music business, unfortunately, is primarily a business of art, of some would say spiritual enlightenment, of spiritual uplifting, of a joyous community experience, of hobby, a leisure time activity. As we all know choristers are unpaid; full stop.

Valerie Riley [from the floor]: They pay!

AW: It is pretty much the same around the world. In fact a point that Val was just making is that choristers often pay to be in a choir. Children’s choir fees will range from anything from \$200 a year up to \$1200 or \$1300 a year. In the senior children’s choirs, the better-known choirs, the average price the parents pay per child per year is between \$800 and \$1000. That does not include the very frequent international tours that are now part of the habit and diet of most children’s choirs. So marketing, financial management, morale, the continual perplexing challenges of choosing repertoire, reading audience patterns, attracting the audience to different concerts, not just *Messiah*—and that is something we touched on—*Messiah* and *Elijah* have had a very good go today; they have had a good workout. I would like us to explore some other options. Every music director for the last fifty years I dare say, upon joining the Philharmonic, has been asked, ‘Are you going to do *Messiah* this year?’ As Peter Bandy said to me at the time we both joined the Philharmonic—he as music director and I as his assistant—we both had a laugh and talk and Peter said, ‘Andrew, if you are game enough to be the first one to stop doing it, I will be game enough to do it, but it is my turn first and I haven’t got the guts.’ I suspect I won’t either. There are all these wonderful things we can look at.

There are lots of issues for choirs these days. We have to look at the fact that recorded music has changed audiences’ perceptions of live performance—it doesn’t just relate to choirs; it relates to orchestras; it relates to opera. The rise in the cost of public liability insurance, for example, in just the last two years has actually made it virtually impossible for some choirs to give public performances as they used to in certain places. There is a decline in public spaces large enough to cater for choirs and acoustically suitable. We only need to look at the number of town halls now controlled by catering bodies—Melbourne Town Hall chief amongst them—to understand the huge problem faced by groups such as the RMP when it comes to programming concerts. There are now approximately three spaces in Melbourne big enough or acoustically suitable for the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic to perform with orchestra. One

of those is entirely prohibitive in financial terms, at a cost approaching \$20,000 for the hire of the Melbourne Concert Hall [now Hamer Hall]. If we filled it, with no orchestra, no soloists and no publicity or anything else, without funding, we would not be able to return our money, which would all be spent on the cost of the venue and the security staff. Then there is the Melbourne Town Hall, which is now controlled by caterers and is almost impossible to book unless you have booked it up to two years in advance at a cost now approaching \$7,000 for one use for one day. That venue too, which is nothing more than an empty shell with no piano and very poor audience facilities, is becoming prohibitive for all but the largest of the choirs, such as the Melbourne Chorale or the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic.

That leaves the cathedrals. The cathedrals are not suitable in many ways, artistically, for programs other than sacred programs. Whilst it is quite suitable to perform *Messiah* in St Patrick's Cathedral or St Paul's Cathedral, it is not necessarily suitable, for example, to perform Orff's *Carmina Burana*. The cost of the cathedrals, too, has skyrocketed. Just two years ago the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic was paying in the vicinity of \$1000 to hire St Patrick's Cathedral for one evening's use. In the last eighteen months that has blown out now to approximately \$3600. Even on these smaller venues, bearing in mind that they are now two or three of the four largest available to choirs such as ours in this city, you can work out the sums when they have a limited seating capacity and you have to bring in the staging, the lighting, the security, the portaloos and everything else that goes with a concert. The costs are now becoming so prohibitive that it is virtually impossible to return a profit on a choral concert featuring an orchestra and professional soloists in at least two of Melbourne's concert venues.

Is it impossible, therefore, to continue? I say 'No.' Are we entirely reliant on government funding? No. The Melbourne Philharmonic, more than any other body in this country, should be an example of what is possible without government funding. After all, in 150 years, with the exception of the ABC years, the Philharmonic has almost certainly survived because of its own entrepreneurial skills, its own *esprit de corps* and a healthy relationship—if not always financial, certainly a very important relationship—with the City of Melbourne as a supporter. I will not use the word 'sponsor' because most of the sponsorship has actually been in kind, but only recently has it actually equated to real dollars.

So, for the future, there are lots of issues to talk about and the idea of today's session is to hear from several different people from different perspectives, and maybe touch on some of those issues from different angles and more importantly to involve you. Many of you are singers with the Philharmonic. Many others of you are singers with other choirs or other musical organisations. There are numbers of you who are musicologists who have a very wise position from which to look at these issues. The idea is that hopefully we can all bring something to a discussion and touch on just a few of the issues that I thought needed to be discussed, which will direct the future of choral music in this city. Thank you.

TL: Thank you, Andrew; now Graham Abbott.

Graham Abbott: Thank you, Terry. It is such a joy to be here on this occasion. Happy birthday Phil: 150 years. That is absolutely incredible and wonderful. Just to catch the sessions as I have this afternoon, it is such a privilege to be part of music making in a great city like this which, even though I no longer live here, I still regard as home. It is just one of the great things about

hearing of the longevity of an organisation like the Phil. Of course, I guess chorally, I am best known for my association over four wonderful years with the Melbourne Chorale, but I think it is sometimes forgotten that the first choral concert I conducted in Melbourne was in fact with the Phil in 1993. If I remember correctly, we performed two very short works by Mozart, the Duruflé *Requiem* and the Mozart *Solemn Vespers* in the Melbourne Town Hall. It was such a fun concert, that one. So I have special memories of my association with the Phil for that very important reason.

I concur exactly with everything that Andrew has just said. I no longer run a choir and don't have to worry about all those issues, which are so real and are part of the day to day concerns of choral organisations. I hate the term 'amateur organisations,' unless we are using 'amateur' in the literal sense, to mean those who do what they do because they do it for love. I like to use the term 'unpaid professionals' because I see in choirs such as the Phil professionalism that would put paid professionals to shame a lot of the time. People who are committed in such a way for no income that you do not find in the so-called professional world. So I love to consider people like the choristers and indeed those who organise it—sit on committees and that sort of thing—as unpaid professionals, because there is a great deal of professionalism even if there is no actual changing hands of money, or not in that direction, as we just heard.

For us, as musicians involved in whatever respect in choral music, what I think is really vital can be summarised as two things. One is engagement. One criticism that is often levelled at classical music in general, let alone all music, is that it is a museum culture. I hate to admit it but there is probably an element of truth in that. Part of it is involved in our making a rod for our own back because we do not engage with our audiences in a way that they require us to. Sometimes I have been guilty of this as much as anyone else. It is possible to go overboard in all this—to wear party hats and have balloons and circus clowns to introduce 'Comfort ye, my People,' and anything in order to try to be novel. We have novelty for its own sake. Of course, that is as counterproductive as getting up there and yawning all the way through a performance. I don't have any answers; I am just propounding the problem here. The sorts of things we need to think about are things that enable us, in performing what is undoubtedly great art, to engage with the audiences to whom we perform, to somehow find a way into their minds, to find a way into their world, to find a way that speaks to them, so that there is not this barrier; we making the sound and they out there clapping and paying for their tickets. Different organisations do this in different ways, and that variety, I think, is incredibly healthy. Different groups do it in different ways. I was fascinated to see the list of choirs that Peter Campbell was mentioning [see pp. 52–54], where groups tap into different community needs and different community interests. That is engagement. It is actually harder to do in big classical choirs because of the nature of the beast, but it is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The other side of engagement is engaging with other choirs, which I think is something that we all are guilty of not giving enough attention to, myself included. Some years ago I was given a copy of a concert program from a choir in the United States in a reasonable sized city, which had several choirs active in it, and this concert from one choir had, on the inside back cover of the program, a listing of all the concerts happening over the next two months by all the other choirs in town. This was a reflection of what actually existed within the city, of a choral cooperative where one or other of the choirs received a small amount of money—say

\$150 a year or something—from the other choirs, in return for which they would collate and disseminate information from every other choir that took part, on the proviso that they would print it on a page in their programs. That is a very simple way of engaging with other choirs. It was very interesting to see the audience reaction as Peter listed some of the more unusual choirs in his talk earlier this afternoon—how we felt uneasy about the idea of a trade union choir, how we felt uneasy about, and I was very interested in hearing how quiet the room went at the mention of, the gay and lesbian choir. It is very interesting that sometimes we in the regular concert world find it a bit weird, I suppose, to deal with choirs that do not have the same sorts of *raison d'être* that we have. That just takes a bit of thought. There is nothing radical here. It just takes a bit of thought. The idea of maybe—I know choirs do this from time to time—having some sort of offers that enable people to come to your concerts for a reduced fee and all that sort of thing. That is just one idea—a think tank on that sort of thing to really bring up some wonderful ideas with all thinking in the right direction. So that is engagement; with audiences and with other choirs.

The other point, which I will mention very briefly, is looking beyond those difficulties. Yes, the difficulties of finance have to be dealt with and they are very real. But looking beyond those, what is the act of singing all about? The act of singing is so unlike the act of playing an instrument. Instrumentalists do not get it. They just do not get it. They do not understand the buzz of the first time you sing the first chord of the 'Hallelujah Chorus' in a big choir. You know what I am talking about. Or the first time you get through the 'Amen' fugue in *Messiah* intact. Or the first time you experience the fiery chariot chorus in *Elijah*, which is one of the great miracles of Western music, in my book. The first time I conducted it I got so excited my arm went into spasm and I got a cramp in my wrist; I will never forget it. They do not get it. Like anyone in any organisation, we need to remind ourselves of how special singing is and what a buzz it is and how lucky we are—I include myself here because as people know I am no singer—those of us who are not trained to just somehow use this bit of gristle in here and out comes Art. It is a miracle. In New Testament Greek, there are two words that mean 'to offer service.' One, *latreuo*, is usually translated as 'to worship', commonly with singing. The other is *therapuae*, to heal, thus our word 'therapy.' I do not think this relationship is an accident. This idea that singing—whether it is spiritual or secular or whatever (I like to think it is more general than that)—is a very special activity that helps us deal with those very real dollar and cents sorts of problems that we have to deal with. I think they are important.

TL: Thank you, Graham. Susie, would you like to speak now?

Susie Howie: Before we go any further, I have a confession to make. In your world I am a Philistine. In writing the speech I had to look up the word 'chorale' in a dictionary. Was it pronounced as in 'of his bones a coral made' or was it pronounced as in the Gunfight at the OK Corral? I know something about publicity; I know very little of the world of choral music. That is really the core part of the advice I am about to give. It seems to me that most people are like me; they do not know much about your world. So choral music has a problem in publicising itself because choirs have not understood that they are not understood. The general public has only a hazy idea of the choir. How many are there in Melbourne? I found out this afternoon, but I had no idea. How many are there in Australia? Are they composed of young people? Are

they old people? Are they mostly middle class people? What do they sing? Is it Latin? Is it remote? Is it sixteenth-century madrigals? Is it *Messiah*? Is it Percy Grainger's folk songs? Is it elitist? Is it esoteric? Whether or not it is, that I suspect is the image of choral music.

Then, of course, why I have been invited here is: what to do about it. I think there is quite a lot that can be done about it provided there is a genuine will to do something about it. If you are prepared to be adventurous and to look for publicity beyond the obvious, beyond the arts page and beyond—begging your pardon, Terry—the cosy confines of the ABC and the *Age*. I believe there is a tremendously exciting opportunity for choirs and choir music to become a highly regarded area in the community. But it means, as I say, taking your art out of its boundaries, its age-old boundaries. Other artistic disciplines have discovered this and they are doing something about it. In the visual arts more and more we see good art hanging on unorthodox walls. Have a coffee down at Mario's in Brunswick Street after the Symposium and you will see what I mean. The Ballet is doing something about it, more and more. Open a fashion magazine and you are very likely to see a fashion spread featuring members of the Australian Ballet. String quartets are definitely doing something about it. They are promoting themselves as sexy and cool. And it is not only the arts. The Queen long ago learnt that to survive she had to go beyond the Palace bulletins, much as she might like to go back to the days before the Rupert Murdochs. The Pope went pop decades ago. I handled the Pope's publicity when he came to Australia. He is a wonderful man, but, believe me, he knew the value of the photo opportunity. Footballers have come to understand it. Not so long ago they were monosyllabic. They were men who could barely express themselves. Today they are elbowing each other aside to get on television shows where it really turns out that they are quite articulate and intelligent and seem to be quite reasonable kinds of blokes. I am not suggesting—oh my God, where is she leading with this?—that choirs and their members should seek publicity in whacky, lovable ways. I do not believe that would work, but I do believe that a Melbourne choir, perhaps a combination of choirs, could be the centre of really widespread publicity of the very best community kind. My suggestion is that there could be a choir laureate supported by the Melbourne City Council, by the State Government, and officially recognised as the voice of the city and the State—the Melbourne choir laureate. Just as a poet laureate—Terry is probably looking at me suspiciously there—but just as the poet laureate celebrated the victories, the triumphs, the virtues and the essence of England, I am suggesting that a choir laureate could do the same for Melbourne.

Where would a choir laureate perform? Where would they celebrate? Well, right now, today, there is a rugby match between Australia and England that will be seen by 50,000 people at Telstra Dome this evening. A couple more million will watch it around Australia on television. In Britain, New Zealand and other countries it will be seen by scores of millions. Would it not be wonderful if the Melbourne choir laureate sang an appropriate song at the opening? And staying on football, and I am quite convinced this could happen—although you are looking at me frankly shocked—but if you are wanting publicity and to be out there, the next time Collingwood and Carlton go together before the big game the Melbourne choir laureate could sing 'Good Old Collingwood Forever' and 'We are the Navy Blues.' It is true; you would get huge coverage. They could sing at the cricket—at the Boxing Day Test—and at the Melbourne Cup. They could sing at Federation Square at Easter. It does not have to be big occasions.

I believe that there could be a community reaction to that; it would certainly get a huge amount of coverage and it could be part of what is happening in Melbourne and therefore have very reasonable grounds for getting funding by the Melbourne City Council and by the State Government. But it could be at the opening of the Fringe Festival, the Melbourne Comedy Festival. Really, there are not limits and there are not boundaries. Whatever this particular choir sang, whether it be original songs or songs composed for the event or songs that are simply appropriate or uplifting, the choir laureate will be a part of the culture of Melbourne. Of course, when I say 'culture' you will know I am using the word in its broadest sense, talking of the world beyond the arts pages, the world that is outside those worlds. I think that is your challenge and I think it is a genuine opportunity for you.

TL: The idea of the RMP as the star turn at the Comedy Festival appeals to me enormously.

SH: I think it has got legs.

AW: We have done it twice.

SH: Oh. I'm sorry. The Melbourne City Council has funded an artist to put gold broaches on rubbish bins and the people to look around and find them. I think it is happening. It is here. I think it could happen. I had no idea you had so many choirs. I think it could appeal to different groups. You all have to work together. You would have your younger people compose for the Comedy Festival. We would love to do that. Another group of people write. Twice a year you are going to sing at the football. We would love to do that. Make yourselves part of the community, as I said, just like the poet laureate remarks on events. I think you would therefore be part of the community and I think you would have to get funding for that kind of community activity.

TL: Susie, thank you. Clive O'Connell, you have the privilege of the last word.

AW: He always does.

Clive O'Connell: That is the way I like it. Mr Moderator, fellow panel experts, ladies and gentlemen ... and singers. I am a graduate of the Melbourne University Choral Society from many years ago. I sang in the bass section for a performance of spectacular effect of the *German Requiem*. I had standing next to me a mate who guided me into the joys of singing in a choir. I did not realise who he was until approximately twenty years later. He was John Pringle, who had a pretty good voice at that stage and, as Graham says, there is an incredible buzz about even singing in unison when you start out 'Denn alles Fleisch.' It is just wonderful to feel all that power—the male power, of course—in those opening strokes.

My directions from Mr Wetherell today were pretty amorphous. We were asked to talk about different matters than those discussed earlier today by the various authorities. So the meandering tenor of what I am going to say will have only limited interest for the scholars amongst you, and there will be no historical resonances at all because the way I heard it we were not allowed to talk about the past. So I will not.

When the Emperor Vespasian put a tax on public lavatories he was reproached by his son Titus for squeezing money from people when they had to carry out a natural, if distasteful, function. Holding a coin in front of the boy, the Emperor said 'Ecumiam non erat'—money

does not stink. I wanted to say to you today something about choirs and money. It was a sad day for Titus for he was clearly born out of his time. He expected his expensive tastes in arches and foreign princesses and razing Jerusalem to the ground to be paid for by somebody—Daddy, preferably, but at least paid for by money which had no odour attached to it; like a Jane Austen heroine, or better still a Georgette Heyer heroine; you cannot marry into trade without taking on the status of a fiscal prostitute. Titus would have been much happier in our times, I think, like an academic putting in for a ARC grant, which is definitely getting money which is not smelly, no matter how questionable its allocating. But I digress.

It would be the source of some surprise to me if people in this room had not seen that much vaunted documentary *Facing the Music*. This dealt with the tribulations—a small part of the tribulations—that afflicted the Music Department of the University of Sydney in its sad attempts to come to terms with a world where money does not necessarily smell, nor do the means of its acquisition, if for the right reasons. In the documentary we were shown the attempt by the head of the department to acquire some funding for her faculty. As far as I can recall, this assault on the bastions of commerce amounted to one letter sent to the Commonwealth Bank. Strangely enough, the Music Department's request for financial input was rejected, like that of half the farmers of Australia, and the professor's funding odyssey request for money faltered. It faded away. To many bleeding-heart observers, what our beloved Prime Minister would call promoters of the black-armband version of arts education funding, it did not matter, apparently, that the documentary acted as the worst possible view or rationale for investing of money in that specific institution which lives in my memory for the erratic behaviour of the professor in question towards a particularly defenceless student, for the poisonous and resentful attitude of staff at a faculty meeting and for the non-productive tiffs between individuals. If this was a sample of the everyday life of a body seeking money, albeit a body under stress for its future, which company or even benevolent fund would invest in it?

Now it surprises me still that so many bodies—I am not really focusing on choirs—devoted to classical music feel they deserve to be given a living simply because of what they do. Just like the erstwhile professor of music at Sydney University, they feel that to muddy their hands by asking for money is a bit demeaning; that singing or playing is all right but to get money to keep the choir going is for somebody else, specialists—as Shakespeare put it, base mechanicals. Well, of course, in the best of all possible worlds, it is. You give that job to somebody to do. This is not the best of all possible worlds, so what do you do to get money? This is 2003. As has already been noted, classical music has been under threat for decades. It is a responsibility of everybody in the field, including critics, to keep the wheels turning, to keep the seasons revolving, to keep the audiences coming, no matter how small. If that means you have to raise funds by the sweat of your brow, then you have to do it. The argot says 'put money in my purse,' and so we should.

Now, nobody knows better than I do the difficult task of asking people for money in a field where despite good examples—Symphony Australia, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Brandenburg Orchestra—people still want it to behave like Opera Australia—put out the hand and in it comes. You open your mouth for a suck at the shrivelling mammaries of the public purse. No, let me rephrase that. A conscientious critic's life is a varied one. I probably hear more varied music than most people in this room, as I wend my way round to the

uncomfortable venues, unlike this wonderful, comfortable place—please, do not sleep—in this city to hear various bodies doing their work. Often it can be just as fascinating to see who these people acknowledge in their programs as sponsors; sometimes it is more interesting to see that than what they are going to perform. It is not that smaller groups need the big sponsors like Electrolux or Sun Microsystems or Channel 7, but I have sat on enough committees to recognise that defiant diffidence—a shyness—that seizes groups required to find money when the first or second requests are knocked back.

I am a company director. I moved into a life of limited commercial success after 34 years as a teacher. Until 1997 it was my lot to take a monthly cheque from an employer—sick pay accrued, long service leave was taken whenever it fell due, superannuation was building up softly. Like nearly every salaried employee, I felt this was at the least my due. I was owed a living for my labour and I was worthy of my hire. But when you have to take responsibility for other people and you are the source of your own income and you become your own paymaster the whole world moves on its axis; you move into a parallel dimension. My first forays into the land of finding business, of going out and getting people to take me on as a provider, resulted in about two positive results for every twenty approaches. That is a good ratio. Some months the ratio would go down to where one in twenty-five might show interest. The point I am really wanting to make about those approaches—and this, I suppose, is the gist of it—is that you must go out seeking money and when they say no you must not take it personally, not like the bank. If people will not give you money, even though you promise you are going to sing only their favourite numbers from *Phantom of the Opera*, it is a ridiculous exhibition of misplaced hubris to take this as an intentional insult; you have to persist and you have to persist in places you would not think of as the first ports of call.

I think, like the two conductors over there, choirs have it over other groups; over piano trios, no worries; over string quartets? You have to be joking. You have more people to offer, more faces for the audience to look at, and because of the nature of choral singing something more physically imposing to get for your money. I might mention here that although I have been in business for six years, no musical body has ever asked me for sponsorship—none. No, don't start. I am in the educational field. That means schools ask you for money all the time, and it is easy to give to them because you have to, basically. But clearly local music organisations still have to discover that there are more potential sponsors in the yellow pages than multinationals and banks.

Finally, by way of not taking it personally, I would encourage you to look at music reviews, especially those in the *Age*, with a lot more tolerance. A choral conductor who is known to me and who, thank God, is not in this room once asked me to speak at the launch of his choir's CD. I think he introduced me with the offhand observation, 'Here is Clive O'Connell. Some of you may like him; others probably hate him. Anyway he is going to talk.' After that naturally he expected encomiums and miracle praise to be heaped on his little gaggle of semi-amateurs. Don't take it personally. If Joel Crotty or I write that the tenors had a night of struggle, what we do not print but probably really mean is that the group should not have been unleashed on an unsuspecting public either as singers or as members of society. If we say that the sopranos wandered through in their work with the chorus in 'For unto us a Child is Born,' what we are holding back from observing is that half the choir stopped vocalising of any kind above E, the dynamics amounted to a shrill kind of bawling, phrasing was non-existent, but a group of

three knew what they were doing and carried the rest. In this restraint that we show we are making, the personal goes out the window. If you extrapolate a criticism of your choir to mean that we find the conductor himself personally a distasteful object or the singers irritating simply by being there, then you are like the Sydney professor, not facing the mildest of facts. Money does not stink; neither, fortunately for this city's cultural life, do its music critics.

TL: Thank you, Clive. I only wish now that I had given you a more expansive and generous introduction. This is now the second occasion on which somebody has said, 'Clive O'Connell, it is your turn.' Does anybody on the panel want to say anything about anything that anybody else on the panel has said so far, before we start our general discussion?

AW: I actually would like to take up one of the ideas raised. I think all of us in different ways have talked about the need for community to be stronger. Perhaps there is the idea of a sort of choral cooperative—I am sure Susie or Graham both touched on that sort of idea of community. A strong sense of community between choirs and also choir directors could be very important, especially in avoiding, for example, major programming clashes. That is an issue that has faced the Phil over the years and increasingly over recent years with the advent of all those choirs Peter was talking about. Something as simple as a general registry of what is going to be happening is a good idea for everyone. I know it happens with the orchestras now. The reason, I think, is that there is such a coordinated approach from Symphony Australia, with the professional orchestras. We do not have an equivalent, unfortunately, for choirs. I can see advantages through all of those themes being gained from that sort of cooperative. It is up to us, I suppose—individual members of choirs, individual conductors, individual administrations—to get together and talk about.

SH: But are the choirs interested in taking their art form where they have not been before? You were talking about the venue situation, which is difficult. Lots of the performing arts complain about the cost of venues. Are you flexible? Are you interested in going to other areas? Really, if one is going to be preaching to the converted, you cannot complain that you are not reaching a wider community. You have to go to where the community is.

AW: It is interesting that all the ideas coming through are all agreed with. I think Clive's point about asking for money, your point about being prepared to go out and actually advertise your wares, all those things, I think, are very real. Certainly I do not speak for everyone, but I do feel that choral music suffers immensely from a lack of confidence in itself in terms of its desire not to be seen to be too populist, not to be seen to be too much in the media, not to be seen to be too involved in its programming or not to be seen to be anything else. It is a conservative art form. I think that is a problem.

GA: I think part of the issue, too—I agree with everything that Andrew has just raised and certainly the issue Susie asserted—is we in the choral scene tend to see ourselves as playing second fiddle in some respects because we are not fulltime professional choristers like a member of the MSO is a fulltime professional instrumentalist. And that is nonsense. We should not sell ourselves short. Even the MSO—I should not say 'even'—sees the need to get out and do a concert with Kiss. I am sure some of the players would be under their makeup thinking, 'Oh, my God.'

AW: I am sure they had a pretty good time.

GA: Yes, once they got on stage it was a different matter. I do not think anyone in the MSO management or players would see that as core activity, not by any stretch of the imagination.

SH: If you do not make the effort to go out and be where the people are, you cannot complain that people are not attending your concerts.

GA: That is exactly right.

SH: We are not saying you should make fools of yourselves or drop the art form or the music that you all love to perform, but you might pick once a month that a different choir goes out to the community and does something that will get you attention and get you a different audience. If you cannot afford to do that, then frankly you deserve to be shrinking. Then you will not get the sponsorship. You will not get the publicity; you will not get the sponsorship.

AW: I do agree and was interested in the list of examples you gave. I thought the example you started with, today's Rugby match, was a fantastic one. I went through the list and I listened with a mild smirk on my face—members of the choir would have been doing the same thing—because all but one of the things you listed, the Phil has actually done in the last two years.

SH: I did wonder about that. I thought, 'Perhaps they have done that. Perhaps they have thought of that approach.'

AW: I feel exactly the same way, and I think that is why we have done it. We have sung at the Comedy Festival. We have done AFL finals, albeit they were pre-recorded (but don't tell anybody). We have done appearances in the back of the Micallef program. My children's choir sang with Kiss. We have been out there and done it all. The bottom line is, though, that those events are always events managed and run by someone else. Do you know one of the things that annoy me?

SH: You do not get the credit.

AW: The choir never gets credit. But apart from that the choir very rarely gets paid. The makeup artists for Kiss were being paid, I worked out, on average about \$85 to \$100 per call, which for them consisted of approximately one hour a night. There were about ten of them, at technical rehearsals and then two performances and one global DVD. It worked out that they were actually being paid each more than the Australian Children's Choir was paid to supply thirty-five children to perform. And that was after I had negotiated a better deal. That is just an example of choirs in general. They have to hire an orchestra at whatever per player per hour; they have to pay the soloists to appear; they have to pay the copyright of the music, which can amount to thousands; etc., etc. When it comes round to the other way, corporations do not want to part with much for the choir because they are not professionals. So, all of those ideas, whilst they are excellent, rely on other people getting in touch with us.

CO: I think in that particular situation you have to make the corporation aware. It is no good. You simply have to go to them and say, 'Hey, listen, we are doing a job and we are worthy of our hire.' I think that is basically it.

GA: 'We have overheads.'

CO: 'We have overheads. We have people we have to train. Good God, we are not like your players; we actually have to rehearse. We have to know something.' I was going to suggest that we go down and do a gig at the Casino tonight at about three o'clock. Just wait around and see what footballer comes out and puts on a turn. We could serenade him. Get in the papers.

AW: If it was Shane Crawford he would probably join in.

SH: That situation is a management-type thing. If you do not consider yourselves important, they are not going to. If you are not going to be paid—actually, virtually nobody who goes on the grand final, on Mikalief or on FM gets paid. None of the others get paid because they do a promotion. But you therefore get that it is a way of presenting yourself and therefore if you are not going to get paid then you damn well want to get the coverage out of it. That is a kind of lateral way of going about it.

CO: That is right.

SH: If you are there as a background thing—

TL: I hear a voice. I am starting to hear more voices from the group.

Rodney Wetherell [from the floor]: With respect, in fact, most of the things that have come forward from the panel so far we have tried. We do respect ourselves and so on. Andrew made some of the points that I would have actually wanted to say a little while ago. But I would like to throw a challenge to you because I think you are in a position to be able to help us. We need professional publicity to help take us to the next stage.

SH: Well, yes. I guess that if you have the skill and the talent and you have actually got the ideas, then it is the way it is approached, isn't it? It is the way it is presented. I suppose that is the next job. I would find it almost unbelievable to think that a choir would not get terrific coverage doing some of the things that I suggested. I just find it almost impossible to think that it would not. But you are saying that you have actually done those things and not got paid—fine—but also not got the coverage. The whole point about coverage, the way everyone does it, is for those other elements that Clive was talking about, to therefore go off and get sponsorship and they all kind of marry together. So something is breaking down, isn't it?

GA: And something Susie said that is really important too is that we need to understand that people actually do not know what a choir is. That sounds really silly. When I was working at the Chorale, that was an even worse term in some respects because people just did not relate to the word. I remember that when I lived in Adelaide before and I was music director of Adelaide Chorus one of our committee members came to me and said that she had had a conversation with a friend, when they were talking about the fact that she was on the committee of Adelaide Chorus, and the only context in which the word 'chorus' made any sense was chorus girls, high-kicking rockettes.

CO: There is a thought!

GA: That put a whole new spin on *Messiah*, I can tell you. But it was an eye-opener. It was one of those things that made me think, "Oh, my God!". We claim music is a language; but it is really interesting.

SH: That is quite sad, isn't it. One hundred and fifty years and people do not really know. So there is definitely a communication breakdown there.

GA: It is so foreign to people's worlds and we tend to forget that. I am as guilty of that as...

AW: At this point, could I break in and suggest that perhaps that was not always the case. A choir was very clearly understood by the great proportion and respected and highly respected. A chorus master, for example, was always named on concert programs or on posters. It is very rare now, if ever, that Symphony Australia acknowledges a chorus master in a broadcast or in advance publicity for a concert—if ever, very occasionally. And the number of times I know I have chorus-mastered performances, and you never expect it. But that is a thing that is a cultural change that has happened. I dare suggest it is partly the doing, in Melbourne at least, of the ABC. I do not like to aim and make wild accusations ...

TL: Just do not look at me.

AW: Terry, if I thought you were guilty, you would not be here. I just observe that since the ABC has effectively come to dominate professional classical music, to the extent of being a monopoly—it really is, in terms of the large scale performances, not only in Melbourne but virtually in Australia—then maybe it is the culture within the ABC that needs to be looked at. One thing that disturbs me is the lack now of choral-friendly people—we have one here, thankfully, who has done a lot of work and is currently doing wonderful work with the ABC. Anyone who has been listening to Graham's wonderful radio program would understand the amount of interest he is sharing with people around the country. But there are very few like Graham who have a direct link to choral music. Most conductors of Symphony Australia orchestras are scared of the chorus. They do not want to do choral repertoire. The chief conductor of the MSO for many years, Iwaki, I suspect was frightened of choirs and as a result during his chief conductorship of the MSO choral performances almost ceased to exist. I think that is perhaps something we could directly change the culture very quickly if we maybe looked at somehow getting a better representation of the choral activity in the country as opposed to one choir, one very select choir in each city. At an ABC planning level, that is an idea, just a wild guess. Feel free to tell me I am an idiot.

GA: No; I just think, having done some announcing last year for FM, there is the ABC and there is also Symphony Australia and it depends which bit of the tail is wagging what, who tells whom what. For example, I was announcing a choral broadcast, and I had not actually been told, in the briefing notes I had been given, who the chorus master was.

AW: Because they did not deem it to be important.

GA: So I had to go out and dig it up myself. So there are lots of things that need attention.

Ros Poole [from the floor]: With reference to something Andrew said earlier, and something Susie said, I have a comment on recruitment and connection. I sang in four choirs when I was

at high school. Then I left high school and 38 years later joined the Phil. All that time I had wanted to sing in a choir. Do we have a practice amongst any of the choirs of directly approaching school leavers while they are still at school? Secondly, has anybody ever considered the possibility—I know this is difficult, since most choristers are actually working 9 to 5—of having a choir that can go and sing at schools—a choir of the calibre of the senior choirs in the States?

AW: I think that is a fantastic point. I am glad. I have it down on my list here of student issues. I totally agree and I talked about that in my comments—that void of school leavers to mid to late adult age people. Where do they go? There are not many youth choirs. Youth activity now is so widespread. There are so many things; they can do anything. Joining a choir, unfortunately, does not list high as a priority when they have to walk into a room full of mainly retired people or people who are certainly twenty years or thirty years older than them. I think there are some things we can do about it. I would like, for example, to be able to give three hundred free tickets away at every Royal Phil concert we ever do, to school-leaving age students, and say to complete choirs at all the Melbourne schools that have music departments, 'Here are tickets for your entire choir to attend our performance of *Messiah*, to attend our performance of *Elijah*'—God forbid, if we do it—'to attend our performance of whatever,' and not only that, open the dress rehearsal and incorporate a talk. In fact, we are planning to do that next year as an education program. That is on our list of things to do. There are issues, though, and one of the ones I was talking about before is that size of venues and availability and cost of venues is preventing that. To fill St Patrick's Cathedral or to fill St Paul's Cathedral, which are now two of the three venues suitable for choirs of our size, we need to sell every seat to get close to break-even. We cannot afford to give 300 tickets away. That is a tragedy. But I think it would be something we could aim towards, and that is where maybe a direct recruiting and advertising campaign could be locked in with sponsorship, perhaps, just specifically for that.

GA: Maybe I could just throw in another issue here. I do not disagree with anything that has been said. But it seems in some of the research I have seen in terms of the Symphony Australia audience demographic we tend to say, 'Woe, woe, woe; all the audiences are grey and there are no people in their twenties and thirties, generally speaking, going to orchestral concerts.' It seems that the demographics are that in their twenties and thirties people are spending their money on other things—families, mortgages, etc. And people tend to come back to that sort of activity in their mid to late forties. That just seems to be what the research is indicating, certainly in Melbourne, from what I have read. It is possible, and this is just conjecture here—that similar sorts of things are happening in terms of choir membership. I do not necessarily feel despair when I see a lot of grey haired people in a choir. Some of my best friends have grey hair and I am getting some now myself. So that is one issue.

Another issue is that there tend to be gaps in people's choral experience. Often, if people are going to a tertiary institution, they will sing in that institution's choir, of which there is a plethora, as Peter pointed out, and then may leave choral singing for a while—this is a general observation—and then may come back to one of the larger choirs later. So there could be a rite of passage, a progression through which people go here, where they may not necessarily feel that it is appropriate to go into a larger choir like the Phil straight out of school. I think it

would be wonderful if they did, and some do; but I do not think we should feel immediate despair at that, and we should not be thinking too much about our own empire building. I had to keep telling myself this when I was at the Chorale. If MUCS is doing well and MonUCS is doing well, I am happy about that because that will probably mean that some of those people will end up in choirs like the Phil later. So it is not necessarily a bad thing. There are other issues.

AW: On that point, I think that point Graham has made is a very good one, and that is the importance for professional bodies, whether it be the ABC, Musica Viva, Symphony Australia, or whoever, to actually work with a plethora of different groups to give those opportunities. This has been an issue going back to the thirties and twenties when there were accusations made that the Phil dominated everything.

I agree with that. I think it was probably bad for music in Melbourne, and bad for the Phil, that any one group becomes effectively a sort of full-time monopoly. I think that point Graham has made there exposing members of MUCS and MonUCS—they are the two major university choirs here that are actually open to the community, giving them the chance to work with the MSO. For example, in the last few years we have done three or four performances, two of which I think Graham has conducted. The effect on the morale of the singers has been profound, because suddenly they are in the Concert Hall with the MSO and being treated like real musicians. They were doing nothing different to what they do in every other concert of the year, but because they were in the Concert Hall and they were being treated as professionals, suddenly they felt worth more, felt more valued. I am sure I would speak for people here when I say that there is a difference when you are in a venue like that and being treated as a professional musician and not just being expected to flog the tickets and the chook raffles and everything else. It does make a difference and it makes the music seem a bit more worthwhile. We all love it but it is good to have that right here. I think that maybe we need to encourage a little bit more attention to community groups and to more than, say, one ensemble in each city.

CO: Could I make a awfully obvious point. It is about kids, when you get kids to come to concerts, children of school age, I mean; we don't get the kids to come to concerts. I am not quite sure whether that is a good thing, having sat with so many of them, in seven years. I think the idea of taking them to a dress rehearsal is much, much better. I also think the idea of having them on stage between orchestra and choir there, either singing or just getting the full experience of the immense blast that can be generated by a choir and orchestra together, as opposed to being the passive people sitting back and saying, 'Oh, God, here we go again, another excursion.' I think that would be a wonderful idea, and I think that is absolutely right; going out to schools. I don't care if they do not like it as a group, because as we know they are determined by groupings. You can sing whatever you like; you can sing the Webern Second Cantata. They will not like it, of course. But eventually, of course, somebody will come round to it, individually; but I think you have to make the effort.

John Craick [from the floor]: On that demographic and life cycle thing, I think you are spot on. The city choirs have a problem there. I have been through that. University choirs are where I started and then I sang in the Philharmonic in Adelaide and so on and so forth. I have

been right through the classic cycle, as have a lot of the people here. There is an interesting problem with young people. Young people do not have transport, generally speaking. They get to the stage where their parents have been dragging them around forever. So the whole business of getting to a group like this when they are just out of school is a problem. It is why the university choirs do all right, because they are on site. Secondly, on the gap in the early twenties to mid thirties and later—I have been through that too; although I did not make a gap out of it. If you try living in the suburbs with a young family and all those sorts of things you have no bloody chance, or almost no chance whatsoever. What does happen, and again we have seen this too, is there are local groups and local groups that we have been involved in set a variety of standards. We have tried to set very high standards indeed, so that people have the opportunity in their own community to perform high level stuff. How they get that interest in the first place is a different problem. That demographic thing, I think, is worth thinking about and working through. The most successful group that I know at the moment takes the young ones and they do Broadway musicals for half the year and ‘proper’ music for the other half of the year. Finally, what do choirs do? I think a few of the more famous and obvious advertisements using things like the Mozart *Requiem* and bits of *Carmina Burana* have had more effect on getting the stuff out and known, so we should be trying to arrange for a program of more choral music as background to advertisements.

AW: I think that is a good point, if I could chip in there. I read an article and I do not know how exactly scientific it was—but it was an article purporting to say that since the funeral of Diana the interest in choral music had tripled worldwide, and in advertising and in film and in the commercial industry and as a result that was trickling down to the choirs and it was an explosion of composition, particularly John Tavener’s work, the *Song for Athene*, that was sung at Diana’s funeral. That work had a profound effect because, so it went, this was a new way of showing grieving, a sort of modern form of spirituality. I think that is actually very important and a very good point. I think this is where maybe the media and choirs need to get into bed with each other—pardon the term—and need to actually be a bit more pushy about suggesting. The other issue for me in Australia is the lack of really good quality composition for choirs. It is very hard to do new Australian innovative music to get Australia Council funding or to get someone to notice you if there is not the work out there that is actually very good. It is changing. It is improving all the time. But that has been an issue. I think most Australian composers would be the first to admit that there has been a dearth of stuff written for big choirs. For chamber choirs and elite small groups, sure—great stuff. But for big choirs, name five major Australian choral works for choir and orchestra.

GA: I completely agree with Andrew on that, but I think the point is that we tend to underestimate the bravery of our audiences when it comes to new music. We find—I say ‘we’ as choristers and conductors and whatever—we tend to find new music difficult because, hey presto, it is not all C major. But in fact when I took the Camerata of the Australian Youth Orchestra to Jakarta some years ago, that was a very interesting experience, because the audiences were hearing music that they did not know. It was not the person on the street, obviously there was a very different culture of who came to the concerts, but we played Beethoven, Rossini, Copland and Carl Vine, and without exception the Carl Vine was the

most loudly applauded piece. It was the most talked about after the concerts. And it was really interesting that the parallel was quite strong, that we were tapping into an untapped audience, an audience that had not really experienced this music before and the immediacy of the Carl Vine *Concerto Grosso* really said something. I think audiences, if the works are presented as seriously and as well rehearsed as we do any other repertoire, would understand and come to love new music better than *Messiah* and *Elijah*. Even though *Messiah* pays my mortgage, I do not deny that for one minute—I am very glad Handel wrote that piece—but I agree it has had its day. Let us do something else, even if it is other Handel.

Rodney Reynolds [from the floor]: I would like to raise the issue of the difference in repertoire between what choirs want to sing and what audiences might want to hear; what we often perform is what the choirs like to sing. But before I do, I heard a recording only a few weeks ago of a certain performance of the Brahms's *Requiem* in about 1961 or 1963. The basses were very strong.

CO: Thank you!

GA: That is an important issue in terms of what the choir wants to sing or audiences want to hear. In a sense—and this is a horrible thing to say—do audiences know what they want to hear? It is very interesting that—I am talking about *Messiah*; let us take absolute core repertoire—up till five or six years ago all six of the Symphony Australia orchestras could be guaranteed to do *Messiah* at Christmas every year. The Tasmanian Symphony stopped doing it about six years ago because it is far too expensive to get the conductor and four soloists, because of air fares, etc. The West Australian Symphony stopped doing it five or six years ago. The Sydney Symphony stopped doing it some years ago. The Philharmonia now mount it themselves at the Opera House. The only orchestra that does *Messiah* regularly is the Melbourne Symphony. The Adelaide Symphony took a year off a couple of years ago. They are not doing it this year. They are doing it next year. So it is not a regular thing. The Queensland Orchestra is not doing it this year, but they are doing it again next year. So, that is a very interesting thing, because the orchestras used to be able to say “*Messiah* will fill a hall” and now they cannot do that; what they do to fill a hall is a Christmas-type family concert, which is starting to pay my mortgage almost as much as *Messiah*. So, the sorts of things we as choristers tend to assume as to what will always sell—I think it is now fifteen to seventeen years since the movie *Amadeus* came out, so I am not sure that we can count on the good old Mozart *Requiem* anymore. Whereas in 1987 you could guarantee you would fill a hall with the Mozart *Requiem* because of *Amadeus*. The media again. I think we need to think outside the square a bit.

SH: Graham, why can't —forgive me, as I sense the tone in your voice—why can't you do a repertoire of concerts of what actually is popular?

AW: We do.

SH: And no-one goes?

AW: You cannot do that, though, every concert.

SH: Of course, not every concert.

AW: You will find that the *Carmina Buranas* are done every second year or something because they will sell—the Verdi *Requiems*, the *Carmina Buranas* have taken over now from the *Elijahs* and *Messiahs*. They are done. But when you have three or four large choirs in Melbourne, I can state now in Melbourne in the last three years if we added up the number of performances of Brahms's *Ein Deutches Requiem*, Verdi's *Requiem*, *Carmina Burana*, *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem* by MUCS, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic and the Melbourne Chorale, just to name those three, we would have about five of each.

SH: But no, no. You are talking about popular in your art form.

CO: Susie means popular.

SH: I am talking about Kylie Minogue or something.

AW: I can answer that. The bottom line is a large choir is not suitable for popular type music because it is all now computer generated, multi-track recorded, click track driven, pre-recorded; they do not want more than ten people on stage. They do not have the room for more than ten people and a choir of 120 voices cannot fit into a television studio. So the bottom line is all popular music—

SH: But first of all you are only talking about publicity. I am not talking about publicity. I am saying take in choirs. I thought you were saying that there were so many choirs and choirs of all sorts of numbers. Do they all have to be 150 people?

AW: The point I am making is that unfortunately now popular music is almost all computer generated. Very rarely is it acoustic—

SH: No, I do not agree with you. I do not agree with you at all. I am working on an incredibly popular show which has not opened yet, which is *Queen*. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra are going to do a bloody *Queen* up in the Opera House. People are interested in *Queen*. I do not think it covers over—I am sitting in an rehearsal studio with one piano, thirty-six voices. There is nothing that is computer generated, click-track or any of those expressions you used. There are 36 talented young people singing.

AW: Sure, but they are doing a season of twenty shows.

SH: You are saying that you're singing and therefore other music is not to be acknowledged in your field at all.

AW: No, I do not mean that at all. But choral music is an art form and that would be the equivalent of asking the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to get up and play banjos and do a hoedown.

SH: There are occasions when opera singers sing popular music. They do not do it all the time, but they do it for the very reason that you seem to need it—to get a bigger audience.

GA: The correlation there, though, is one voice to one voice. The transplanting of something—I have done a choral arrangement of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'—

AW: So have I.

GA: And the audience hated it.

AW: Because it does not sound the same as the record.

GA: It was so foreign. Because the transplanting of that, it is like a drama show I saw once which had a performance of the Beatle song 'Yesterday' played on a consort of viols. It was so removed from the original that people could not relate to it. It suddenly stopped being popular because it was put into a format that was so foreign that it was being seen to violate the original. As someone who has been programming schools concerts a lot over the last ten years, or fifteen years, one of the things I have rapidly discovered does not work is if we take a popular song and do an orchestral arrangement of it, because the kids start throwing chairs, because it is not the same.

SH: So, it absolutely does not work at all? All those famous opera people who go out there and sing a popular style and actually sell millions of records and perform to vast audiences are all wrong?

GA: No, it is the repertoire. That has nothing to do with the repertoire. If tenor X down the road did what Pavarotti did, they would not get 20,000 people in Wembley Stadium. It is Pavarotti singing that.

SH: Yes, but the reason why they choose to do popular is to broaden that audience.

GA: No; the reason Pavarotti sings that is that he cannot sing opera anymore.

SH: I am sure that is true. So are you saying you can only sing in that art-form?

AW: It is a very difficult art-form because it is an art-form that involves large numbers, and the point I was making about television studios and everything else is that people get to know popular music now, they expect it to sound the same live as it does in the CD in their lounge room, and you cannot prep John Farnham—I know because they tried to get me to do it—you cannot take a John Farnham song and then try to make it sound like John Farnham with 100 kids singing in four-part harmony. It is not John Farnham. The audience boo you off the stage because anyone who does like John Farnham goes there and thinks, 'Why are you ruining my favourite song?' It would be the same as presenting an opera with a synthesiser and a couple of waa-waa machines and a teenybopper in a pink boob-tube doing aerobics round the front.

SH: I think you are taking a very simplistic line.

TL: Which opera did you have in mind?

AW: Let us be safe. Let us go for *Tosca* maybe.

TL: We must finish. I intend to let every participant have one last word. Clive, you can have the first last word.

CO: This has nothing to do with the last word or summation. I was just going to try to support Susie. She is talking about something that is very hard to deal with. We all understand that

there is no point in dumbing down your chorus to sing something that is not worthy of you or that kind of thing; but there are things you can choose that do lend themselves to arrangement. I know they are pretty much all American. That does not matter.

Peter Campbell [from the floor]: Or new compositions.

CO: Or new compositions, Peter, thank you. Yes, we need new composers to come up with something like melodies. The lady does have a point.

TL: Susie, do you want to have the second last word.

SH: So, if I can get whatever part of the choir—thirty-six to forty—to be on the *Footy Show* to sing Good Old Collingwood Forever—

AW: We'll do it! We sang it this year. I have done the last five AFL grand finals and the sad thing is that, whilst they want the choir there, they pre-record it because you cannot do live performance outdoors. So it is pre-recorded. Because it is pre-recorded they do not actually want to pay the same people to be on the ground. So they get school kids in, even though it is an SATB recording they get school children who are only treble voices to mime it on the stage because it is free.

TL: Graham, you can have the last last word.

GA: I think what I said at the beginning of my little spiel is probably backing up what Andrew has said. I agree in principle with what has been said here. The Phil, probably more than any other organisation, is actually getting out and doing this. It is actually getting out and breaking down those classical-popular boundaries. I think it is the choir that can actually teach other choirs a thing or two. I think that is a wonderful thing. I do agree, though, with what Clive said earlier, that you do need to make sure the people understand your worth and your value. I remember at the Chorale once just telling an organisation that wanted to book us to do something that would require ten rehearsals to learn something—and they were going to pay virtually nothing—I said, 'A chorus master's fee for ten, three-hour rehearsals, a pianist's fee for ten, three-hour rehearsals, a language coach's fee for ten, three-hour rehearsals, our overheads of lighting and heating, bla, bla, bla, administration pro rata—this is what it is costing us to provide you with this choir.' People need to understand those sorts of facts and figures of what it costs you to provide that.

AW: And did they engage the choir?

GA: Eventually.

TL: Thank you very much to all of you. Clive, thank you for your contribution from your particular point of view. The critic obviously plays a crucial part in the relationship between the performer and the audience. You do contribute to the maintenance of standards, which is a difficult thing to do without scaring the audience away from the next concert. But the role of the responsible critic is appreciated by every performer and from my point of view by every member of the audience. Thank you very much.

Susie Howie, why are you hiding your head there? It has been an absolute delight. Susie's current assignment is looking after Barry Humphries, which gives you some idea of both her status and the respect in which she is held in the performing arts, but also her extreme generosity in being here this afternoon.

I will thank Graham and Andrew together, because the two of you have given me as much pleasure as I can remember having in concert halls at performances. There is something about the exuberance with which you do your art which communicates obviously to the performers. I watch the choir. I watch your orchestras. And I see in the performers themselves an anxiety to please you and I see in you an affection and a respect for your performers. That flows back across the audience and fills us with a tremendous sense of joy that we are there on that occasion. I really should not take this liberty. But one thing that relates to critics, to conductors, to performers: often I will say to people 'We are going to a concert by the Phil this evening,' and the first thing a person will say to me is, 'Are they any good?' 'What do you mean by "Are they any good?" I am going to a concert this evening, where I expect to hear at least a competent performance of the great music of the Western tradition. Just to be there is a privilege in itself. Are they going to be as good as the Vienna Philharmonic and whoever it is who sings with the Vienna Philharmonic? I do not know, but I am not going to hear the Vienna Philharmonic. I am going to hear Mozart performed by a choir and an orchestra here in Melbourne. If I wait for the Vienna Philharmonic, I may never hear it.'

I think that behind that question 'Are they any good?' is the perception that a fully professional ensemble like the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is paid to perform for the audience. An ensemble that does it for the love of it is perceived to be doing it for itself, and it might be fun to go along and hear them and listen to them amuse themselves. I feel when I am saying to people 'Come with me. Come with me. Come and hear it for yourself,' what I am saying to them is 'Get those sorts of prejudices out of your mind. This is an ensemble of musicians who are going to perform great music. This is a great opportunity.' And some of the most wonderful moments I have had of musical performances have been with particularly performances of the RMP and even, dare I say it, *Messiah*. Till the day I die, I will never forget the boy who played the trumpet obbligato in 'The Trumpet shall Sound' at the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria. I have never heard anything like it in my life, and I have heard some great orchestras of the world. It is that you contribute to the cultural life of this city. I am grateful to all of you and to you four for the contribution you make. Thank you all very, very much.