

## **Musica Viva Seminar: Finding Australian Chamber Music for Secondary School Ensembles. Some thoughts- Joanna Drimatis**

*Questions for Discussion and responses*

*For discussion:*

### **1. What are the resources and how to access them?**

*So where do we start?*

The first step is to familiarise yourself with the **Australian Music Centre** website. Become a member or encourage your school to become a member. Membership gives you unlimited use of the library (which means accessing sample scores digitally) as well as discounts on music purchase. In addition, our sponsorship through the membership fees directly supports the work of our Australian composers and is an investment in Australia's musical future. The Australian Music Centre is based in Ultimo, Sydney. The library is not a physical library, but the majority of resources can be accessed digitally and if not, the staff are fantastic and will do their very best to source the repertoire that you require.

Anyone can purchase or source music. However, to access the library you need to join with an annual membership. I can't stress how wonderful it is to be able to download repertoire instantly if you are a member of the library – as a musician and educator this access is invaluable to our profession.

However, you don't have to be a member to purchase music or explore the website.  
<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au>

Now that you are in the website - take time to explore. You can search via the type of ensemble you wish to find music for, by composer name or search repertoire that has been written for a specific playing level. Please take time to enjoy listening to the musical examples and view the score extracts.

Sheet music and books can be purchased as well as educational kits and resources.

<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au>

Start on the website

Please see the screencast but the directions below should also help with navigating the website.

#### **First approach**

1. Type **Chamber Music** into the search box
2. Go to level of **Difficulty**- go for **medium or easy**- depending on the ensemble.
3. Enjoy the search. Most works have a sample score and recording.

#### **Second Approach**

1. **Choose a composer- spend time looking at the biography.**

I will start with Paul Stanhope, then Matthew Hindson, Elena Kats-Chernin, Katy Abbott, Philip Wilcher, Natalie Williams, Daniel Rojas(Saxophones), Brendan Collins(4 violins), Hollis Taylor, Keyna Wilkins(Aurorae Sinus: string quartet)  
Older composers: Margaret Sutherland, Peter Sculthorpe(Little Serenade), Miriam Hyde, George Dreyfus(saxophone quartets).

2. Then choose: **Browse Works**
3. **Chamber Music**- should appear. Click on this link.
4. Go to: **Difficulty**- the levels are -easy, medium and advanced. Medium is suitable for high school to start with.
5. Some composers don't have the level of difficulty on the side tab- but it may be embedded into the description of the works themselves.

The most important part of finding Australian music is to learn about Australian composers. Where else can we access this information?

- i. ABC Classic FM:  
There are new Australian works played and discussed on New Waves with composer Stephen Adams:  
<https://www.abc.net.au/classic/programs/new-waves/archive/>  
There is also a program on Thursday evenings from 6pm-7pm that is dedicated to the performance of Australian Art music by predominantly Australian musicians.
- ii. There are a number of Australian art music playlists in Limelight magazine. Subscription is minimal for digital access and worthwhile for elective music students in a school.  
<https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/aussie-art-music-playlist-september-2020/>
- iii. University libraries. Go to your local Conservatorium library and spend time sourcing Australian music.
- iv. Local music publishers:  
Brolga Music Publishers: <https://www.brolgamusic.com>  
Wirripang: <https://www.australiancomposers.com.au>
- v. Go to your local music shop and ask for works by Australian composers. It is also possible to go online and type 'Australian composers' into the Sheet Music Plus website and the majority of works are by Australian composers. However, as this is an international site I would always double check and research the composer that is of interest to you.

## **2. What are the strategies for finding repertoire at all skill levels?**

- i. Know your students and their abilities. Once you have an understanding of the playing ability of your students- then you can start to source repertoire for your ensemble.
- ii. Talk to the instrumental tutors- ask them what repertoire has worked for their students and ensembles in the past. Are there Australian works the tutor has performed that they have enjoyed. It is these conversations that are invaluable as wonderful ideas can evolve from engaged collaborations.
- iii. In the current AMEB syllabus, there are a number of Australian composers used in set works for the various grades. Once your students are informed of their level have a look at the repertoire. Here you will find a number of composers that have written works at this grade and from there you can research as to whether they have written chamber music either via the Australian Music Centre or other sources.

## **3. How do you commission composers to write for your student ensemble? What is involved?**

- i. Some schools may have a composer on the music staff, or the staff may know someone. If so, this is a perfect opportunity to commission a work from a known composer to write a work for the students. There are opportunities to apply for education-based grants through state-based Education departments. In the private system it is worth pursuing a project grant to fund a new work. This can work especially if you have an ensemble that is a little unconventional.

*JD. For example, I had a group of students who wanted to play together and the combination was viola, cello, double bass and piano. Our pianist and double bass player could perform at an AMEB Diploma level and the violist, cellist although extremely musical were not as advanced technically on their instruments. This was the right time to commission a work from our Head of Composition, Tristan Coelho at MLC. The whole process from 'pen to performance' was exciting for the students and we now have a new work in the chamber music literature that can be performed by each of the students for their HSC if they wish and by other ensembles in the future.*

- ii. If there is no composer on staff, my suggestion would be to visit or call the Music Department at your local University. There will always be a composition department and it is important for undergraduate composition students to learn about composing for all levels of musical ability. With the right negotiation, you may be able to talk the Lecturer or Professor concerned into including the composition as part of their students' assessment task.
- iii. Once you have found your composer and you have found sufficient funds for the project then you need to establish a time-line. It is important that you have enough time for the composition to be written and for the students to

learn the work. Therefore, if this is of interest for your ensemble for next year, I would be contacting a composer now. This allows the composer a few months to write a short work of approximately 4-5 minutes and approximately 1 ½ terms for the students to learn the work. The work should aim to be written by the end of the year so that the students can start preparing their part over the summer holiday.

- iv. Rehearsals can start at the beginning of the year or at the end of the previous year depending on the availability of the composition. Give the students time to learn the work and then bring the composer back into the equation to work with the students once the students have learnt the works. This experience involving the creation and performance of a new work is fantastic for the students as they become closely acquainted with the whole creative process from start to finish.

#### **4. When/why/how to encourage students to write or arrange for student ensembles (a strategy for finding suitable chamber music).**

It is always the right time to encourage student compositions.

For senior school music elective students, composition is part of the assessment process. The opportunity for these students to compose music for their friends can be met with both enthusiasm and trepidation. However, as an educator your role is vital in supporting the collaboration. It is important to scaffold the composition tasks with particular guidelines of instrumentation and ability level which will ensure that the experience is user-friendly for the students and thus help the inspiration process.

Arranging is a useful skill and should also be encouraged at any age.

Arranging can start from a complex source or simple. With your students you could generate from a melody a series of chords to accompany the theme. From these chords parts may be created. To work on this process with the students is invaluable to their learning on musical construct.

For secondary school students, it is possible to start with a score that could come from a piano reduction or a work that was originally composed from piano.

Talk to the students about which instruments could play each line and go from there. Ask the students to bring in their instruments and play through a line of music in the range most suited to their instrument.

This process now becomes collaborative and serves as an inspiration for creativity.