

The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra Education Program, and The Big Rehearsal Project



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The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's Education Program offers a range of opportunities for children and teachers to experience orchestral music. The players and management of the orchestra are committed to providing rewarding and exciting experiences for children and young people. We take pride in presenting a program of concerts, workshops, performances and events that open the world of orchestral music to young people as listeners, performers and composers. The Program is designed to appeal to students from Early Childhood to Secondary level and beyond, and encompasses exciting and memorable music from the past to the present.

Current research has shown that a child's intellectual, social, creative and physical development is enhanced by participation in music. The ASO's Education Program offers students, not just the gifted, the opportunity to engage with orchestral music at a number of levels. In addition to participation as audience at school concerts, there is the chance to perform with the ASO with the Big Rehearsal Project, and to join the musicians when they perform in schools.

For the very young, we have **Kindergarten Kapers**. These are concerts aimed at the 4 - 6 year old audience. The 80-piece orchestra is reduced to a manageable size of 45, so as not to overwhelm the audience. Whilst this may seem patronising, the sound of an 80 piece orchestra can be very loud in our studio, and I am mindful of health and safety issues, and sensitive hearing in children. In addition, there are so many things and people to look at during the concert, that with a smaller orchestra we can focus attention on particular sections or players - they are easy to observe when there is less to look at! These concerts were presented at the home of the ASO, the Grainger Studio, at 91 Hindley Street. The students are seated on the floor, with the orchestra seated directly in front of them, string section on the floor and woodwind, brass and percussion elevated on staging.

The repertoire for these concerts is selected for length (between 3 - 5 minutes), variety (great classical works, contemporary Australian work, and music from other genres such as film music) or to illustrate particular instruments, orchestral colours, techniques or styles. This year, for example, we opened with a fanfare by the Australian composer Nigel Westlake, and followed with a movement from a symphony by the English composer Willam Boyd, which featured the brass section "in conversation" with the string section. Other works included a harp solo, a percussion solo, Brahms *Hungarian Dance No. 5* featuring a gifted young local violinist, Mozart's *Musical Joke* featuring the horns, Leroy Anderson's *Waltzing Cat*, complete with audience participation, and finished with *The Big Parade*, a piece of film music by Carl Davis. Teachers are provided with notes about what to expect, advice about how to prepare their students and ideas for follow up, as well as information about each work to be performed and a layout of the orchestral seating plan.

The presentation of these concerts must be friendly, educational and entertaining and engaging. We are very lucky to have a member of the orchestra who is able to conduct and present these concerts whilst remaining perfectly at ease with his young audience. The children are encouraged to listen, look and learn. The conductor will introduce the work, provide a context or introduce a concept, or colour or technique to listen for, and then follow up with questions afterward. Soloists are brought to the front of the orchestra to they are clearly visible, and they are interviewed. There is a balance of humour and information throughout the concert, which is 50 minutes duration. We aim to stimulate the imagination, provide information, and open the children's ears to sound and music.

For older students in the primary years, ages 7 - 10, we have concerts called **Primary Proms**. These are based on a similar format to **Kindergarten Kapers**, but with a slightly larger orchestra. We present 5 - 6 works each about 4 - 6 minutes in length, with the conductor again providing the insight for the way in to the music - what to listen for, dissecting elements of the work to explain what the composer has done, and giving a focus for listening. We don't neglect the basics of introducing the instruments, and revision of the orchestral seating plan, but the essential ingredient is the music itself, and the world of possibilities in sound that composers create. Again we present variety, which can be linked by theme, or idea. This year, for example, we settled on an environmental theme. We began with a fanfare by Maria Grenfell, a contemporary Australian composer. Works which followed included:

- a movement from Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (the *Pastorale*),
- Britten's "Sunday Morning" from *Four Sea Interludes*,
- an excerpt from a work called *And God Created Great Whales* by the American composer Alan Hovhaness, (which included the sounds of humpback whales)
- music from the film *Jurassic Park*, by John Williams.

These concerts are 55 minutes in length, and there is encouragement to listen, look and learn, and opportunities to participate. We added a visual element this year by including puppets during some of the works. Whilst many teachers commented that they felt this was an excellent addition to the program, especially for visual learners, I believe the presentation of other arts forms during the concert should be managed judiciously. It should only be included if it adds to the understanding and appreciation of the music. The orchestra is not there to accompany something else. The focus should first and foremost be on the orchestra and the music. The music educator R. Murray Schaeffer said "Music is something which sounds. If it doesn't sound, it isn't music." And, stating the obvious, we perceive sound by listening. We are inundated in this day and age with visual information, until it seems to have become the primary sense. The art and skill of active listening should be encouraged, as it is an effective avenue for learning, thinking, reflection and analysis.

These concerts seem to achieve what they set out to do, based on feedback received by teachers. One recurring comment is that teachers would prefer that we presented music that is familiar to the children. I understand this, but am actually reluctant to comply and would prefer an alternative approach - to provide a CD recording of the program, as well as a comprehensive list of suggested activities, linked to the SA curriculum. It would then be up to the teacher to prepare and familiarise the students with the music before coming to the concert. The orchestra is not there to perform popular TV themes (the most common request). These can be heard daily. I would far rather open ears and minds to the colour, sound and creativity of composers, which live performance can bring to life.

Secondary school students are able to attend any ASO subscription series concert at the heavily discounted price of \$10. Throughout the year the ASO also opens up a number of rehearsals to secondary school students. These **Open Rehearsals** are a rare opportunity for students and teachers to experience the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, guest conductors and soloists working together in rehearsal. Students can experience both great symphonic repertoire and new music while learning first hand how a conductor and orchestra bring music to life. These rehearsals are part of the Orchestra's preparation for major public performances, and a unique, fascinating glimpse into the working day of a professional musician. Each rehearsal features the full Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, in the final rehearsal before an evening concert from the Series 2003 concert program. For many students it is their only experience of the orchestra, as only a relatively small number of students have parents who would routinely take them to an orchestral concert. The Open Rehearsals are also open to retirement groups such as The University of the Third Age, because the ASO recognises the learning continues throughout life.

The ASO recognises that it is not always possible for children and schools to come to see us, so the **Outreach Program** takes musicians into schools, in small performing ensembles. The String Trio has been visiting schools and kindergartens since 1997, and has performed for over 9,500 children. By June 2003 the Trio had

already performed in 30 different schools and kindergartens this year, including visiting disadvantaged schools in metropolitan and country areas.

The Brass Quintet and the Wind Quintet visited primary and secondary schools in May. Both these ensembles presented programs which give students an opportunity to hear and see wind and brass instruments at close quarters, in their own school environment, and the opportunity to ask questions of the players about the instruments, and about their work. The Wind Quintet in particular was especially delighted to visit Kapunda High School and Nuriootpa High School in the Barossa Valley in 2001. Their performance for Year 12 students at these two schools gave the students an opportunity to write reviews – which is part of their Year 12 assessment requirements. In addition, they were invited to sample the wines made by the students at Nuriootpa High School, leading to a request for me to place them in other schools with such enterprising ventures!

We have also initiated a **Training and Development Package** for teachers, in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival Centre. Teachers, especially in primary school, are expected to teach every subject, and in the performing arts that includes giving their students access to professional performances, and building this experience into their curriculum and teaching programs. But many teachers do not feel confident in teaching the arts. They may have strengths in maybe two or three but rarely in all five (dance, drama, music, visual art and media) The package was built around attendance at three orchestral concerts. In addition to the performance, the teachers attend an introductory seminar to provide basic information about the orchestra. A player is present at this seminar and is able to give insight into the working life of a professional musician. The teachers must also attend pre-concert talks, and a follow-up seminar, to discuss how they will take what they have learned back into the classroom.

You may well ask at this point how this relates to gifted and talented students. My answer is that music education is for everybody. Within each classroom, however, there may lie dormant a student with "an ear". The gifted student is not necessarily the most brilliant performer. The creative act of composition requires extraordinary talent. The composer needs to understand sound, and instruments, and to know how to notate music - although this did not stop the Beatles. The composer's talent and gift lies in creating something new from the same medium, like the choreographer, the photographer, the painter, or the playwright. They work with that most abstract of the arts - music only exists in time - but it can move people beyond words. And what of the conductor, the person who mediates between the intentions of the composer and the performers who produce the sounds? The ability to bring the notes to life, in concert with other highly trained and talented musicians and singers, is not always given to the most gifted performer. I used to think of those lessons with students where we listened to music, analysed what was happening, and learned about it, as the times when fires might be lit...

The Big Rehearsal Project is an exciting and hugely successful innovation in orchestral education programming. The ASO is the only Symphony Australia orchestra to offer this kind of program, and it is the envy of other orchestra Education Managers. Young instrumentalists have a unique opportunity to be involved in the preparation of a 30-minute concert program with a professional orchestra and conductor. Each student is paired with an ASO musician who acts as mentor and guide during the rehearsal and performance. The student instrumentalist receives a copy of the parts to practise prior to the event and on the day sits beside their mentor throughout the rehearsal and performance. Both the student and the ASO musician play the same part. This means the student is not confronted with an exposed solo line that might be too difficult for them to play. Through the rehearsal they gain more confidence and take on more of the playing on their own.

In The Big Rehearsal, students are able to play challenging music, which would not usually be possible in their own orchestras, supported throughout by their own personal mentor. There are two categories of The Big Rehearsal, which have been developed and devised to cater for students who have achieved a specific level of instrumental performance standard. The Junior Big Rehearsal is for upper primary - lower secondary students who have at least 3-4 years experience in learning their instrument, and have achieved a minimum AMEB grade 3 level. The Big Rehearsal is intended for secondary students who have had at least 4 -5 years experience, and have achieved a minimum of grade 5 AMEB level or equivalent.

Students apply to participate, and must include 2 references to accompany their written application. They are then ranked according to the stated skills and experience, and selected for participation accordingly. There are no auditions, and student feedback indicates that they think the selection process to be fair and satisfactory.

In 2001 we introduced an additional element to the process by providing section tutorials in the week prior to the Big Rehearsal. This provides the students with the opportunity to work through the music with an ASO player, to get an idea of how the section sounds, and to focus on fingering, bowing, phrasing, breathing and ensemble awareness. They also meet the other students who will be at their Big Rehearsal. Student feedback indicates that they have found the tutorials to be very useful - "they make the actual Big Rehearsal less daunting".

The Big Rehearsal Project is now in its seventh year. At the time it was first proposed, South Australia was the only state in Australia that did not have a resident, functioning youth orchestra. There was no regular orchestral activity during the year for many young instrumentals to participate in. Only a handful of schools in Adelaide were able to offer orchestra in the school music program (and this is still the case). A youth orchestra is the training ground for tomorrow's orchestral musicians and audiences. Whilst this glaring lack of opportunity has now been addressed with the establishment of the Adelaide Youth Orchestra in 2001, the ASO has continued to offer The Big Rehearsal Project because it fulfils a different need. It gives gifted and talented young instrumentalists a taste of what it is like to perform in a professional orchestra. It is like work experience for a day. Real, live, work experience. They get to see what the standard is like. They are sitting next to the professionals, making music together. They learn how exciting the sound can be, but also what hard work it is! It breaks down all sorts of barriers. Students whose only ensemble experience might be the concert band come to grips with different repertoire and a string section. The only violinist in a school can spend a day with her peers. The 15 year-old talented violinist who is considering giving it all up can be turned around. They learn how a professional conductor brings music to life, but from the working side of the podium - they get to see his (or her) face, to follow his directions, and work at his pace.

The Big Rehearsal Project has been a resounding success. The most difficult aspect of the project is selecting appropriate repertoire. We try to find work that can be performed by the students at their skill level, but that is not so hard that they focus only on the notes, and not on everything else that is happening around them. Students work with regular orchestral repertoire, but we also include arrangements of film music, and contemporary Australian music wherever possible. This year, for the first time, we will include an arrangement of an orchestral work for the Junior Big Rehearsal.

The beauty of The Big Rehearsal Project is that it gives a focus to young musicians about a career path other than the high-flying soloist. Orchestral musicians are all incredibly talented, highly trained people. When the ASO auditions players, they come from all over Australia and from overseas (for Principal positions). The students initially regard these players with awe. But in the course of a day they find that they are people like you and me, who are at home in this environment of creating music every day. And they have extraordinary talent. It gives the students a real appreciation for that talent. They leave the Big Rehearsal with enormous respect for the players. These students, and their parents, may believe they are themselves extraordinarily talented, and so they may be. The Big Rehearsal Project gives those students a career to consider.

The Futures Project takes the concept behind the ASO's Big Rehearsal Project to the next level by offering **tertiary** students the chance to prepare for and perform a full-length concert with the ASO. The program for this concert is more rigorous and demanding of the students, and some of the student players are expected to perform solo parts. In 2001 the pool of students came from the Elder School of Music, and many of them are auditioned. The Futures Project occurs over a period of 4 days, with 5 rehearsal calls and a performance call. During this time project the students work with their professional orchestral counterparts, directed by the conductor. This presents a unique opportunity for these young musicians in training to develop a rapport with the professionals, and for the professionals to pass on skills and knowledge in the orchestral setting. Due to

time constraints and programming issues there is no Futures Project in 2003, but it is a Project that will be resumed in 2005 with the ASO Chief Conductor.

Another project with an education focus, which first occurred in 2002, was The **Composers Workshop**. This workshop was for tertiary students who are studying composition, and involved the workshop, rehearsal and recording of arrangements and compositions by these young composers. This represents a rare learning opportunity for these students; it is a chance for them to listen to their own work and that of their peers performed at a professional level, and to receive feedback from the conductor and the musicians about their writing.

Whilst children are our future audience, the Education Program exists to engage, inform, educate, and cultivate a taste for orchestral music in young people. Their positive and enthusiastic response to our music never fails to delight us. Our challenge for the next few years is to dispel the notion that the Education Program is *only* for students and schools. We are currently working on strategies for audience development – adding value to existing programs so that those who want to know more about orchestral music can have that opportunity – but also ways of encouraging new audiences to give us a try, and to sample what we have to offer, so that a wider audience will feel that coming to an orchestral concert becomes part of their choices when it comes to spending that discretionary dollar on “entertainment”. We want *everybody* to experience, and hopefully become addicted to, live orchestral performance.