

## **INSIGHT ON EXCELLENCE**

**(Pearls from the panel, at the Alan Lane Memorial Workshop (29<sup>th</sup> - 30th June)**

After opening the breakfast forum, John Colwill surprised us all with a poignant memory of a childhood experience, and challenged the panel to be as frank. John spoke of the wonderful warmth of the piano room in Warwick where the open fire burned all day in winter and the air smelled of his soft teacher's lavender powder. Fortunately our hard working president is so in touch with that happy inner child that he has developed an early childhood keyboard programme based on the premise that children learn through pleasure.

Professor Peter Roennfeldt, who sat at one end of the table, responded without hesitation to John's impromptu question. One of his most memorable contacts with a teacher occurred when he was studying in the U.S.A. The teacher (Bela Siki) never showed lack of interest in any of the repertoire Peter was working on no matter how many times he had performed or taught it before. He also inspired students to make their own way with a piece, and to forge an individual voice. For Peter this was a wonderful period of personal discovery and exploration of the repertoire, as well as being an example of a teaching model that worked very effectively.

Tony Hodges' teacher also encouraged him to explore, by placing instrument after instrument into the hands of the self-confessed 'mediocre band player'. The trumpet was the one that grabbed him, and the orchestra suddenly became the place he knew he wanted to play it.

The dynamic composer Sonny Chua still feels the excitement of hearing his first teacher play to him. "It was amazing!" Now his bold music amazes children, audiences and teachers alike, especially when he plays a tune in many different styles.

Glen Riddle's teacher (Edie Myers) remained a close friend all her life. He even chose a secondary school close to her studio. He recalls long sessions in which they would try the new music she was always buying. She had contacts all over the world. Now he continues on seeking, selecting and performing, the new, the intriguing, the unique.

Though passionate about her work, Margaret Schindler describes herself as a 'customer' for want of a better word. Beginning voice training in her late teens, she maintains a warm relationship with her first teacher (Janet Delpratt), but thinks it is unfair to expect to find 'The Perfect Teacher' in 'The Perfect Place'. Margaret has orchestrated a brilliant career by making mistakes and 'shopping' the world for the best way to correct them. Her motto is "If you want to be a singer, you have to look like a singer". There must be many who wish they could look like her!

There was at least one time when Stephen Chin might have thought that teaching the violin was a mistake. His body language communicated the horror of remembering the first lesson he tried to teach, far better than words could. Most of us would agree, that a childhood spent under a strict communist regime, and devoid of music education as we know it, could not have prepared him for an Australian classroom, but Stephen's success is an assurance that even a bad experience can spur you on to better things.

A community seniors group in England has given Kathron Sturrock some of her best teaching memories and at least one of her worst. She insists that this group of students, who performed for each other once a month and received her gently supportive guidance, were undoubtedly her best teachers. However one elderly man stands out in her memory because, after attending for over a year without performing, he announced that he was going to play a nocturne, and literally thumped his way through it. He had forgotten to turn on his hearing aid. This anecdote is significant because Kathron uses inner hearing to develop touch, “Sing it how it should sound”. When she and Piers Lane played the Mozart Sonata for four hands in F Major, they became as one person, and the magnificent Steinway grand piano sang in one vibrant subtly composite voice.

Robert Keane all but worships the genius and larger than life personality of the only teacher for him – Nancy Weir. He is so appalled that very little has been written about her, that he has created a website, [http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy\\_Weir](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Weir) in her memory, and would welcome contributions to it. There was an immediate response from the floor to this request. One of our members recalled that at a very merry party, Nancy once played a Brahms Fugue with her right hand and ‘Smoke Gets in Your Eyes’ with the left, and one leg was up on the keyboard, Wow!!!.

Of course he could not top that, but it fell to Paul Dean to have the last word, because he sat at the other end of the table and had declined the invitation to go first. Paul has reminded us that just one experience can change a life forever. Upon hearing Paul nervously play the clarinet, a young lecturer who had just arrived from America announced to his student “You and I need a drink!” Five hours and several drinks later, after consuming a large quantity of clarinet music, Paul became intoxicated by “The greatest voices ever - Schwarzkopf, Fitzgerald, Sutherland, Callas, Robeson - to name just a few”. He was hooked and now lives in the challenging and addictive world of chamber music.

Seated in the packed ‘houses’, some of us were lucky enough to gasp at the intricate co-operative beauty and the passion of that world a few days later, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Festival of Chamber Music, but that is another story.

I hope that by reading this you have some insight, not only into how human and accessible these artists are, but also into the professionally hidden effort they have to sustain. I consider myself fortunate that they, some remarkably resourceful teachers of regional Queensland, their students and I, have shared a truly inspired weekend in such a friendly, informal atmosphere in Townsville. My praise and thanks go to the organising committee. Even the food was excellent.

*Diana Murray*