

Strathfield Symphony Orchestra Inc.

Report by the President for 2006-2007

It is my honour to present the President's Report on the activities of the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra Incorporated for the year 2006.

With the changes to our Constitution, the Orchestra's formal year now runs from January to December. There is therefore some overlap with last years and this years President's Report.

During the calendar year the Orchestra staged eight concerts with an average attendance at each of around 200 people.

Following the sudden departure of Paul Dhasmana our conductor for the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, we were incredibly fortunate to secure the services of Sarah Grace Williams as our Conductor after you were all smart enough to vote for her at the audition.

In our first concert Program for the year headlined "A brave new world" we performed Dvorak's Carnival Overture and his Symphony " From The New World and Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with soloist Ben Van Tienen.

The next concerts in July, " A Russian Spectacular" were exactly that with the Swan Lake Suite, the Polovtsian Dances by Borodin and Rimsky Korsakov's Scheharezade. Paul Hoskinson our concertmaster was the soloist and the choir was the Australian Institute of Music Vocal Showcase Ensemble.

The atmosphere for these concerts was electric and for the second one, patrons were queued down the street for a full house.

Following the success of these two concerts the Committee confirmed Sarah Grace Williams as Chief Conductor for 2006 and asked her to develop the program for 2007 and 2008 in conjunction with the program committee. During the year Sarah-Grace Williams was also appointed Artistic Director.

For the September concerts we performed the Nelson Mass by Hayden in conjunction with the Taverners Consort of Voices and Mozarts Haffner Symphony.

For the final concert program of the year we undertook the Egmont Overture, the Enigma Variations, Carmen Suite and Vocalise.

Under the baton and drive of Sarah Grace Williams and an energetic and committed committee, the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra, your community

orchestra, has expanded into challenging repertoire and reached new heights of performance. This has been an exhilarating ride but has caused tensions with some of the members as the repertoire has become more demanding. In some ways the Orchestra is now a victim of its own success, with the orchestra's management committee which is totally comprised of playing members of the Orchestra, starting to wilt under the strain. More professional levels of organisation in forward planning, recruiting and communicating with players, publicising performances and building audiences, managing membership, ticketing and performances have been required. These demands will increase as the Orchestra continues to develop. Whilst we have been attempting to recruit capable non playing volunteers to assist, the reality is that we, the playing members will continue to have to do the bulk of this work. So my message is to say, ask not what the Orchestra can do for you but what you can do for the Orchestra; otherwise there might not be one.

Looking forward, our next concert is a world premier and will be staged at a new venue. My apologies for the short notice of the change of venue. I know it is inconvenient for many of you but your committee had to make a judgement call on whether to change the venue or change the program and drop Antarctica and the chance to stage a world premier.

Paul Pokorny, our previous Concertmaster continues his association with the Orchestra as leader of the Strathfield String Quartet and will be returning to play in Antarctica and as guest concert master for our next program. Paul Hoskinson, who is unavailable for part of the rehearsal schedule for the Planets is threatening to return for the concerts with his viola. Paul has brought a new level of preparation and precision to the role of Concertmaster and he is also contributing strongly to the management of the Orchestra. Thank you Paul.

During the year the Orchestra lost two players who have been part of the backbone of the Orchestra for many years, Geoff Widmer and Vincent Leonard.

Geoff has been part of the organisational and playing backbone of the organisation since the mid seventies. Geoff was already Vice president in 1976 and took over as President from 1977 until 1988. He continued as a vice president until 2005? (Info from the book; it was a 30 year history of the orchestra entitled "The Thirty Years Story") He has made cellos and lent them to players – He fixed up our double bass - made boxes for stands, made conductor's stand and made supports for the Orchestra risers.

He was the main telephone contact point for the orchestra for many years. In a personal anecdote, his encouragement when I made an initial inquiry played a part in me plucking up enough courage to join the orchestra after not playing orchestral music for 25 years

Vincent Leonard has been a playing member of the SSO since 1999 and has always contributed to the organisation of the Orchestra. He was assistant Librarian for 6 years, cheerfully undertaking the sorting fetching and carrying. Most recently designed and helped construct the storage boxes for the chairs. Forced out by the recurrence of an old shoulder injury. We have previously played Vincents compositions and we are looking to schedule one of his compositions in the programming for 2008.

There are a number of generally unsung heroes and heroines without whom the Orchestra would not function. They include the amazing Shirley Mahableshwarwalla Shirley who despite moving to the South Coast and whilst not formally on the Committee, still managed front of house for our concerts and in providing the refreshments at interval. Similarly Bruce Dunlop who keeps our financial accounting up to scratch and has acted as auditor for many years.

Ted Davies- Always the first to arrive to set up the orchestra and one of the last to leave after organising the refreshments at the break and packing the Orchestra up.

I also wish to highlight the contribution of the hardworking members of your Committee over the last year, some of whom are not standing for re election to the Committee.

Bruce Lane, previously Treasurer took over from Margaret Shirley as Orchestra Manager last year. Without Bruce we would not have a community orchestra, he has been the main driving force behind the orchestra over the last three years. Bruce is not standing as Orchestra Manager this time.

Rowena Cseh, who has produced the excellent publicity material and programs for the Orchestra. Manages to keep on top of the myriad of jobs as well as running her own business

Merryn Horrocks our very efficient Secretary and webmistress who is not standing again.

Kitty Blythe who did excellent work as our Treasurer prior to moving back to Melbourne

Judith Baker and Vincent Leonard who acquire, issue and recover the music used in our performances. Judith, despite an injury that has prevented her playing with us has continued to come to Strathfield and organise and issue the music. Thank you Judith.

Natalie Meaney who has assisted with the staging of performances.

Simonil Bhavnagri who has calmly and competently stepped in as Treasurer in the recent period.

Last but certainly not least, I wish to recognize those Orchestra members who turn up early to assemble the stage and the risers, the chairs and the stands; and then stay behind after the performance to strip it all down again.

We thank the Council for the regular use of this lovely Town hall as our rehearsal and performance venue. Without the stable foundation of this base, there would be no orchestra. The Orchestra recognizes the two way nature of this obligation and as always was pleased to again stage a special performance for senior citizens week as our first performance of the year. Also over the last year the Strathfield Quartet, comprised of current and former members from the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra has delivered a musical program for citizenship ceremonies hosted by Strathfield Council.

The Strathfield Symphony Orchestra has enjoyed another year of fine music making, its thirty sixth in this Municipality. In this period of growth and development, we look forward to ever greater musical heights and audiences in the year to come.

Chris Elenor President 28 May 2007