

Strathfield Symphony Orchestra Inc.

Report by the President for the year 2008

It is my honour to present the President's Report on the activities of Strathfield Symphony Orchestra Incorporated for the year 2008 to this annual general meeting.

The Orchestra's positioning until last year was "SSO serious fun". This has served us well in driving the generational change and the redevelopment process over the last five years. However we were ready to expand more widely for our 40th anniversary year. So last year at the AGM, out went serious fun and in came Strathfield Symphony, Orchestra of the Inner West. Our vision was to position ourselves with a number of communities and Councils across this broadly defined territory of the Inner West and to play in a range of venues without losing our base and association with Strathfield Council.

We have been fortunate to again have Sarah-Grace Williams as our Artistic Director and Chief Conductor in 2008. SG has planned, worked and conducted us to some great performances over the year. With an influx of younger players attracted by the ambitious programming and leadership of Sarah Grace and our concertmaster Paul Pokorny, the Orchestra has continued to develop musically and artistically.

During the calendar year the Orchestra staged five concerts with an average attendance at each of around 200 people for the concerts at Strathfield Town Hall and 400 at Petersham Town Hall.

Our first concert program of the year invited people to 'bring their families to experience the thrill of a live symphony orchestra catching a wolf and the world premiere of On the Skating Rink'. You could even sit on rugs close to the action. Peter and the Wolf saw the return of Brian Bell as the narrator and the world premiere of On the skating Rink, a composition by SSO life member, Vincent Leonard.

For our second program (two performances) we went to Russia with love performing Fire and Water (Lotus) by local composer Elena Kats-Chernin and to the Steppes of Central Asia with Borodin, Khachaturian and a performance of Symphony No. 5 by Tchaikovsky.

For the third concert program we went to Petersham Town Hall for an enchanted evening and after the Don Giovanni overture we, to quote from the publicity,

“experienced the enchantment of the Tchaikovsky violin concerto through the subtle and powerful virtuosity of Susan Collins and then fell under the tuneful spell of Dvorak’s 8th Symphony woven by the wand of Sarah-Grace Williams.”

For our final program for the year we returned to Strathfield for some musical geography with the Overture to Coriolanus – Beethoven, Norwegian Dances - Grieg and the London Symphony, No 104 - Haydn. Audiences were not so good for this program.

In this our 40th year it is fitting to honour the long term contribution to the Orchestra of Christine Edwards. Christine has been a player, committee member and longterm supporter of the Orchestra since 1973. In my time with the Orchestra, she has rarely missed a concert or annual general meeting and until recently was usually in company with her mother, the late great Miriam Hyde.

I am sad to report that some longstanding members of the orchestral tutti retired at the end of last year. These include Marie Hodsdon, violin and Belisario Hernandez, who played first violin with desk light obbligato. You will notice that the Committee proposes to award life membership to Christine, Marie and Belisario this evening.

Belisario first joined the Strathfield Symphony in 1975. His contribution to the orchestra in my time has included making cassettes of the pieces we were playing and sharing them with the players. An idea we have revived recently using the newer technology of CD’s.

Marie Hodsdon has been with the Strathfield since 1996. Marie in my time with the orchestra has always been the one to organize thank you, get well and congratulation cards to be signed by and for members of the Orchestra, distribute complimentary concert tickets and undertake leafleting and postering for publicity in unknown suburbs.

In 2008, SSO Inc had 66 members of whom 20 are life members or non playing subscribers or volunteers. A significant number of players with the Strathfield in 2008 did not take out financial membership of the Orchestra or contribute to the marketing and staging of performances. This had a significant impact on membership and patron revenue over the year and for governance and membership benefits for the 2009 year. I am pleased to report that membership for this year, including subscribers and volunteers, currently stands at over 90.

I reported to the AGM last year that,

“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.”

The demands have continued to increase and whilst we have made progress, we are still struggling to get sufficiently far ahead of ourselves. We have some vacancies on the Committee that will need to be filled if we are to deliver the programs in 2009 and which are being planned for 2010 – please consider.

2008 saw the introduction of an annual concert subscription package as a way of building support and consistent audiences for the orchestra. Subscriptions for 2009 have grown significantly. I recommend them to you as gifts, particularly at Christmas time. A sponsorship package was also developed but with the lack of a marketing person and the global financial crisis this has had little success. Sponsorship in kind remains the main way local community and business support the Orchestra.

There are a number of generally unsung heroes and heroines without whom the Orchestra would not function. They again include life member Shirley Mahableshwarwalla who still oversees front of house for our concerts and has provided the refreshments at interval. Anhita Teleyarkhan and Lucy Shelton have been providing great front of house and box office at our concerts with Jerry Zylberberg and Jenny Lane providing logistics support on the day. Dorothy Jamieson has provided great secretarial support to our marketing efforts and again baked a much sought after Christmas cake as a prize for our annual raffle.

Julia Park has stepped up to provide refreshments for the tea break at intervals in the rehearsals. Thank you Julia for this essential service.

Thank you also to webmaster Merryn Horrocks, our website which is proving to be a great front door for potential players and patrons.

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 for this coming year.

Bruce Lane our Vice President; without Bruce we would not have a community orchestra, he has been one of the main driving forces behind the orchestra over the last five years.

Rowena Cseh, who has again produced the excellent publicity material, quality programs and flyers for the Orchestral programs in 2008.

Jenny Ainsworth, our Librarian who has acquired, issued and recovered the music used in our performances.

Probably the most demanding role on the Committee, Orchestra Manager, was undertaken by Justin White in 2008. Justin stood down from the role in December 2008 so a particular thanks to Serena Devonshire, who has taken over this role with assistance from Sharon Hatton (brass) and Jacinta Mikus (winds).

Thanks to Laura Jamieson who has provided event management, organisation and staging for some difficult logistic challenges in the last year and has continued as the Public Officer of the Association. Laura has been one of the other mainstays of the orchestra over the last decade.

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

The Orchestra was fortunate to acquire a quartet of string instruments by Auburn maker John White (1927) from life member Ted Davies. The instruments are progressively being set up with a view to a performance by the Strathfield String Quartet.

The orchestra has also acquired a significant quantity of light orchestral music which previously belonged to the Railway Institute Orchestra. This holding needs to be conserved and catalogued.

We again 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 members from the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra has again delivered a musical program for citizenship ceremonies hosted by Strathfield Council. A particular thanks to Roger Barker who was the inaugural cello, manager and arranger for the Quartet.

The Quartet currently comprises our Concertmaster, Paul Pokorny, Laura Jamieson, Chris Elenor and Alicea Gedz and has undertaken community engagements for both Ashfield and Leichhardt Councils.

The Strathfield Symphony Orchestra has enjoyed another year of fine music making, its 40th in this Municipality. In this continuing period of development and

regeneration, we look forward to ever greater musical heights and audiences in the year to come.

Chris Elenor
President

25 May 2009