

AUSTRALIAN ROMANTIC & CLASSICAL ORCHESTRA

RICHARD GILL PRESENTS
A VOYAGE OF MUSICAL DISCOVERY
LET'S MAKE MUSIC

PROGRAM THREE:

AUSTRALIAN ROMANTIC & CLASSICAL ORCHESTRA AND CAMERATA ANTICA

VOICES AND INSTRUMENTS

Welcome to the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra's third *Voyage of Musical Discovery Composition Kit* for 2018.

This kit will concentrate on providing teachers and students with what is hoped will be helpful information about song-writing with some examples to test students' skills at word settings in combination with a restricted number of instruments, together with some brief explanatory notes on the other works.

The works which will be presented in the *Voyage of Musical Discovery* concert are:

Johannes van Bree Allegro for Four String Quartets

Edvard Grieg Elegiac Melodies

Claudio Monteverdi 'O come sei gentile'

Alice Chance Ode to Melancholy (Australian work)

Elena Kats-Chernin Black Tie (Australian work)

EXPLANATORY NOTE: Because of the very strict copyright associated with the two Australian works in this program, we are not able to provide detailed analysis of these works. Teachers can purchase the works from The Australian Music Centre and treat them appropriately.

JOHANNES VAN BREE **ALLEGRO FOR FOUR STRING QUARTETS**

A recording of Johannes van Bree's work, Allegro for Four String Quartets, by the Concertgebouw Chamber Orchestra is available on Youtube (<https://youtu.be/eo0Lb01HZhw>) and contains a very useful Merton Music publication of the score for students and teachers to follow.

In this work students will hear an excellent example of music known as Functional Music or *Gebrauchsmusik* to give it its German title, and demonstrates Van Bree's compositional method spectacularly.

The principle behind this work may be considered to date back to the Psalm and Antiphon tradition of the Jewish Temple which saw its counterparts in Early Medieval music in the Roman Catholic liturgies and later all the principal liturgies associated with Christianity.

The most triumphant form of divided choruses of instruments finds its peak in the glorious brass music of the late Renaissance; a field of music rich with musical ideas for composition.

EDVARD GRIEG

ELEGIAIC MELODIES

These melodies for a string orchestra are styled in the nature of an Elegy, a poetic form which has crossed over into music. They are in essence Songs Without Words. Look at the great catalogue of Songs Without Words Felix Mendelssohn wrote, for example.

In specific terms an Elegy may be defined as a poem or song written in couplets sometimes described as elegiac couplets in honour of a person's death. Elegy comes from the Greek word 'elegus' meaning a song of bereavement accompanied by a solo flute. (Already a compositional idea emerges). In general terms, an elegy may deal with reflections on death, memories of a loved one which may conjure up emotions of grief, remembered pleasures, especially intimate times or places.

There are excellent performances of these melodies on Youtube which, when you are listening to them, will demonstrate very clearly Grieg's concern for musical line – a first principle in composition. Here is a link to a live recording which features the score:

<https://youtu.be/OTOLQybg7N4>

Notice also the following:

1. Grieg's sense of musical direction as the lines move forward and the voices interweave.
2. The use of the violoncello as a powerful source of musical expression against the sobbing accompaniments of the upper strings.
3. The use of rubato, robbing and paying back of tempi, to achieve an affect of lament. Do we cry at a special tempo? Do we sob our hearts out rhythmically? Does anyone cry in time?
4. Grieg's use of dynamics, especially forte and fortissimo, allow for grief to have a wide range of expression.
5. Compare the string writing of Elgar, Tchaikovsky and Sibelius (especially Valse Triste, potentially a type of lament) to Grieg and observe obvious parallels and differences.

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

O COME SEI GENTILE

As with the Grieg and the Johannes van Bree works, there is a splendid Youtube version of this extraordinary work of Monteverdi's by The Consort of Musicke with an accompanying score (<https://youtu.be/p7fhbKsdvBA>).

This work is rich with resources for students especially when dealing with the art of vocal decoration and the setting of text. Notice how Monteverdi approaches every cadence and how as the cadence is approached the intensity of the writing increases each time. This approach to cadential writing was to become a hallmark of many musical styles. Teachers will explain this in reference to first movement form as developed by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

Students would do well to observe how Monteverdi treats every vowel in the decorative sections and his generous approach to rhythm. He was, in my view, the master of this rhythmic style which left its mark on most subsequent Baroque composers. Monteverdi was also the most sensitive of composers in respect to the settings of text. Students and teachers would profit greatly from a special study of The Prologue to The Coronation of Poppea (preferably the Alan Curtis edition) especially the concluding duet between the Goddesses/Fates, Fortune and Virtue.

In this opera, evil triumphs over good. That concept was not to last long as opera moved into the late Baroque and Early Classical periods where some courts insisted that their composers finish all operas with a happy ending!

MAKING MUSIC

The English poet Thomas Gray wrote an elegy entitled: *Elegy Written on a Country Churchyard*, probably somewhere around 1750 and possibly inspired by the death of his friend Richard West.

The opening lines are here quoted:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

(The spelling of plowman is as Gray chose. In quoting this poem I am going back into the recesses of my memory as a fourth grade boy in 1951 and the poem is as fresh now as it was then.)

The reason for the quote is to provide you with an example of a text which is rich with imagery and has an abundant supply of ideas to generate musical thought.

1. Examine all the words which deal with the finite nature of life: curfew; knell; parting; lowing, as in crying; darkness. All good examples to highlight in a song.
2. Observe how short the end rhymes are – day way; lea – me.
3. Observe the stresses in each line and the use of the pick-up at the beginning of each line. There is a name for this metrical device stressed in fives. What is it and who was its greatest proponent?
4. Say these lines and commit them to memory. The reason for committing them to memory is to make certain you understand, as well as possible, the nuances of the rhymes and rhythm and the sentiment being expressed.

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF SONG WRITING

1. The text must be thoroughly understood by you, the composer.
2. Every nuance in the text can be reflected musically without necessarily interpreting the text in a literal way; that is the music may represent, but not necessarily describe the text exactly.
3. Choose the voice for which you want to write. If it is a classmate for whom you are writing make sure the vocal range is comfortable and singable. This sounds so obvious but I see dozens of songs from students which are so vocally extreme, surgery would be required after the performance. Or, on the other hand, the range is so restricted that boredom sets in after bar three.

4. In my view, the most important element in the music is line – that is, the flow and direction of the music. This does not mean that rests are out of the question but look and listen to the way Monteverdi uses line in *Come sei gentile*, for example.
5. Consider the phrasing and the balance of the phrases. Look at any Schubert song, for example the first song in The Maid of the Mill cycle, or the first song in *Die Winterreise* and notice how the text is set syllabically, or where a word is repeated and why, or how a word is elongated. Notice also his absolute fidelity to the text and its intention.
6. Choose a couple of instruments to accompany your song so you set up a series of independent lines. For example soprano voice, flute and cello; alto voice, clarinet and flute; baritone voice, clarinet and single line piano.
7. Choose an appropriate tempo and mark it. Remember, metronomes work best in 12s or divisions thereof. For example: MM 48, 60, 72, 84, 96 108, 120, 132, 144, 156 and so on OR, 48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78 etc etc. While speeds such as, 53, 65 and 71 are sometimes used, I find them fussy and unhelpful. In the end, however, it's your choice and if you want to write at crotchet 51 that's your business.
8. Adding marks of expression is a dangerous occupation. My recommendation is again to go to Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and others and examine their expression marks thoroughly.
9. Don't be afraid to cross bars out, repeat motifs, alter notes and so on. However, in the first instance TRY TO IMAGINE THE SONG IN YOUR HEAD then write it down.
10. If you know lots of songs from the rich world of songs, including current popular material, sing them in your head often. It will improve your aural imagination greatly. I make it my business to try and recall and entire Beatles song from memory and hear the entire song in my head.

Now try to set the text above or a find a different Elegy and perform it.

I hope you enjoy this *Voyage of Musical Discovery* concert, our final concert for 2018. Next year's program is finalised already and your teachers will be receiving an Early-Bird advanced information packet by email.

Best wishes,

Richard Gill AO

Artistic Director

Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra