

Dear WHO members and friends,

I thought I would continue with discussing Charles Mackerras' influence on the Australia's music scene during his lifetime, specifically on his involvement with bringing music to communities who lacked the opportunities we take for granted in our major cities. Fulfilling the vision Sir Charles Moses had for the ABC, Mackerras was always eager to take orchestras out of the main centres and into rural areas. This was never more so than in the early 1960s. His schedule was frenetic. For example, Friday 1st of February 1963, Oslo Philharmonic in Norway; 5th of February, rehearsals with the Queensland Symphony followed by 57 concerts around capitals and country towns.

Charles negotiated into one of his visits to Australia, a trip with the QSO on their annual tour to the far north of the State. This tour had never been undertaken by someone of his reputation. Mackerras gave concerts in schools, ancient and modern halls that ranged from frightful to excellent, a cinema where the heavy instruments had to be hauled up to the stage by pulley and in Townsville, a concert to 1,400 in an atmosphere stinking of sulphur fumes from a recent fire in the adjacent sugar mill that had recently burnt down. Sleep on the train taking them to each destination was difficult, and the sharp bends and shunting to let goods trains through caused lurches and shuddering jolts. Charles wrote "this was the most unusual train movement I've ever encountered. You can see why people say Queensland trains run on square wheels". There were very few facilities for washing clothes and in the Queensland climate without air conditioning, conductor and musicians had to dress on the train and walk to the venue. However, Charles was enchanted by the astonishing beauty of the scenery, and by the warmth and enthusiasm of the audiences. I can relate to these receptions as my travels around country towns with the Victorian Concert Orchestra has always seen the rewards of amazingly warm and receptive audiences coupled with wonderful country hospitality. Three days after leaving Australia at the conclusion of that exhausting tour, Mackerras was rehearsing in Cologne.

Another great Australian musician who followed that tradition of taking music and musicians out of the big cities, in this case Brisbane, was the world class pianist Nancy Weir. Loved by generations of Queensland musicians, Nancy left Australia at the age of 13 and headed for Germany to study with the Beethoven descendent and master pianist, Austrian born Artur Schnabel. He, out of interest, was the first pianist to record all Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas and was known more for his great musical integrity rather than for his technical bravura. Nancy told the story of her fortunate escape from Berlin on witnessing the build up of heavily armed troops and fled, at the last minute, to London. There, she won the main piano prizes at the Royal Academy of Music and even worked as an interpreter for the Churchill Government, given her perfect German. Nancy was a close friend of my cello professor John Kennedy and highly regarded English cellist Jimmy Whitehead, who later lived out his years in Adelaide. Teaching at the Elder Conservatorium (University of Adelaide), he left a profound impression on the musical life of that city, as did fine clarinetist Gabor Reeves, father of MSO principal bass Steve, and Jiri Tancibudek AM, Czech born oboist and conductor. Tancibudek incidentally, was a close friend of Charles Mackerras both in Prague and later in Australia. Both had a strong connection through their oboe playing.

Nancy ended up at the Queensland Conservatorium as a teacher and mentor. From there she organised tours with the students to the far north and inland centres where they performed concerts for schools and communities alike. Sometimes, they all

bedded down on the beach between towns to keep down the cost. On one trip west near Roma, the bus they were travelling in became bogged on the side of the dirt road. The police were called, and a local farmer with his tractor was summoned to pull the bus free. By now the hour was getting late so the students and Nancy were invited to stay the night in the nearby farmhouse where food was provided by the locals. Nancy, the highly educated artiste and the farmer got on famously, his generosity occasioning her often to state: “those fine Australian country folk are a dying breed”. There was a dance that night in a small local hall to which the students were all invited, taking their instruments and playing the night away, accompanying the record player. These and many stories were lovingly retold when Nancy would invite hordes of her ex-students, some now married with children and playing professionally, back for famed parties at her home in the years to come. It is no wonder so many fine musicians came out of Queensland in the late 60s,70s and 80s. Many ended up as leaders of the next generation of musicians, all fondly remembering their formative years and the mark Nancy Weir left on their lives. It certainly was my privilege to meet her when touring and listen to stories of not only music in London post war but also of the vibrancy of musical life in Queensland. The access to the arts in rural areas and the opportunity for children to experience the performing Arts should always remain an essential goal for State and Federal governments. To this end Queensland, with its vast distances and diverse cultures, has provided resources better than most.

This week’s concert consists of a potpourri of pieces loved by audiences everywhere.

1. Capriccio Espagnol by Rimsky Korsakov Op. 34 The Berlin Phil. conducted by Joao Viriato.
2. Invitation to the Dance by Carl Maria von Weber - cellists, check out the different principals in the many recordings. A good visual lesson. Or just enjoy the music.
3. The Planets by Gustav Holst “Jupiter”. On HD classical.
4. Bolero by Maurice Ravel. Vienna Phil conducted by the rising star Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel. Now Musical Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.