

A Life Divided



CURRENCY HOUSE

Notes on Music, Management and their Uncommon Personal Bonds.

Arts and Public Life Breakfast Lecture

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by Kim Williams, CEO-Foxtel

When asked to give this address by Mary Vallentine – someone I couldn't refuse - I was a little perplexed as to what to say or how to present.

Mary had indicated that this series of lectures was intended to stimulate debate in the wider community through an exposition of ways in which the various speakers initial arts training - in my case as a musician – had informed and contributed to their careers.

The Director of Currency House, Katharine Brisbane, followed this up asking me to talk about that early training and its continuing personal value. In doing so she indicated that some people had confided that they use their personal skills from arts training in every day life – clearing the mind; exercising the imagination; in conflict resolution; issues of integrity; and in the capacity to foresee the consequences of action or decision.

That I thought, is going to be a very difficult assignment. Difficult in that I have not previously ever really sat back and thought about the way in which music has influenced my thinking. And so in presenting to you music will be my companion

[NB. 41 separate excerpts of music from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Wagner, through ethnological recordings, Ross Edwards, Peter Sculthorpe, Cole Porter and diverse popular pieces accompanied the lecture presentation]

Music is fundamental to my view of the world and the enjoyment of it – providing almost a natural prism through which I observe and perceive things so that I never really stand back and think about it deductively or didactically. I always have music in my head. I carry it around and it resonates inside me.

Music is I believe fundamental not just to a well rounded education but also to an expansive view of the world for many reasons that I would like to set before you in this illustrated narrative.

Music teaches us about things that are not discussed or emphasised in our lives generally or sufficiently– it teaches us about beauty and the enduring value of human creativity.

Music like all the arts provides emotional nourishment. And whilst this is not a contest with the other arts, music is particularly special because it is not primarily about our physical world having only passing reference to it – it is about another mental and emotionally felt place and experience. It so often is not about words or images of our terrestrial world but rather about invoking deep inner feelings and primal activators in us all.

Music is the only creative art that is found in all human cultures. It is universally necessary and central to life whether in an African forest or an Arabic souk; or in a formal concert hall and on to the many variants and music forms we might know on the world stage.

It features virtuosity in many guises and in many places.

It can be about the most simple pure notions of love through to the most complex romantic expressions of the feelings, conflicts and bonds between men and women. It offers us an expression of the pantheon of all human experience from the most vulgar to that which is sublime and in a way that can be gripping and a source of constant self renewing abundant satisfactions.

Music can lift one's spirits and move us like no other art form, whether it be from the magnificent sound of a single instrument through the glory of the human voice.

Music is central to our most sacred devotions and to our most frivolous and delicious entertainments.

Music is consistently central to all human experience and expression .

It is one of the most aspirational and inspirational phenomena for youth across our planet.

It can provide deep satisfaction whether through playing, composing dancing or pleurably listening. It is fabulously portable and now pervasively available.

It provides a creative partnership to lift excitement, atmosphere and meaning in other areas of human creativity such as the theatre or film or television It can also reveal new found wonders in the way it can genuinely surprise one in the manner by which it can so to speak, catch one up with its profundity.

And for me what is fundamentally important about music and what makes it so very special is that it is about using the sense from which, in the experience of life, we are most desensitised – our hearing.

Sight, taste, touch and smell are all senses which we can switch off – we can elect not to experience any particular thing with each of them. We can't switch off our hearing in the same way and therefore what we do is that we generally have much less awareness of and sensitivity about our hearing and the aural universe – often a cacophony – which surrounds us.

The noise of life is an atmospheric accompaniment that we are inured to resulting in the outcome that all too often we are poor listeners. We simply don't pay attention. Whether that is to something being said or to the rich aural domain provided by any number of musics. It is reflected in the way people rarely register oral communication evenly or accurately.

I suppose that I first fell seriously in love with music when I was twelve and took up the clarinet at school through the encouragement of my closest male friend to this day – Richard Gill. I had arrived at the clarinet by way of the flugelhorn and before that the banjo.

When I was about nine or ten, my maternal grandfather had given me a large and beautiful old banjo which I believe he had owned for decades. I remember it as being monstrously large – more than half my then height

So my mother enrolled me in classes with a local music teacher – Mrs Bulger of the eponymous Bulger Academy of Music where as proudly stated on the polished brass plaque at the front of the studio annexe to her home in Reserve St, West Ryde the following were taught: Elocution, Pianoforte, Banjo, Violin, Singing and Music Theory. .

Mrs Bulger rest her soul did not I think, care much for music or indeed children. She was of ill and short temper. I still recall playing this huge banjo – or rather trying to as it was far too big for me – and when ever I repeated a mistake she would push my fingers into the strings until it really hurt – she even cut the skin on one or two occasions. She would say to my mother that I had weak fingers and we should strengthen up the skin by soaking them in brine or some such similar nonsense.

I was really fearful of Mrs Bulger and like many kids in that era of around 1961 said nothing to my mother other than about the awkward size of the as I recall it quite monstrous beast of an instrument. A smaller one was acquired with which more agreeable results musically and physically were experienced. My fear and loathing of Mrs Bulger however increased exponentially. I was transfixed with fear when the day of the fateful music lesson approached each week. After what seemed like an eternity but was probably only a matter of months I burst into tears and confessed all to mum. The Bulger Academy ceased to play a part in my education. First life lesson – you need to like and respect your teachers to get ahead.

What didn't stop was my curiosity about and eagerness to learn music. I thought it was great. I had enjoyed learning to read music and even after my Bulger tuition had ceased I used to play the instrument for my grandpa.

I recall being surprised and hugely pleased when I would play to him or my elderly Uncle Douglas what were for me quite foreign tunes, such as *Annie Laurie* or *Home Sweet Home*, and they would recognise and identify whatever piece I was muddling through.

I learnt to enjoy the pleasure that my playing brought them. It made me feel warm and close. So I suppose that that another life lesson was that of deriving pleasure from delivering a performance for others.

I made my way from West Ryde Primary to Marsden High School in Ermington where much to my pleasure when I arrived the school offered me an instrument to learn. Public schools in those days principally because of the initiative of the remarkable and quite eccentric Terry Hunt – the chief inspector for music in secondary schools- provided starter instruments.

I commenced on the flugelhorn because that was all that was available in the storeroom and as soon as a woodwind instrument became available I changed and a long relationship with the clarinet ensued.

First I learnt from Reg Bryson who was a peripatetic teacher who would arrive at home in his FJ Holden on Tuesday afternoons promptly at 4 o'clock. Nice guy but pretty ordinary teacher. Then I went to the Conservatorium to first study with Douglas Gerke and finally with the great musician Donald Westlake – a truly fine player who was the second major external adult influence on me after Richard. It was with Don that I got a pair of Symphony 1010 clarinets – a major moment.

I played quite well and learnt the daily discipline that only a musical instrument or advanced sport can bring to a young person. I practised constantly – before school, at school during the lunch hour and after school.

Initially I was second clarinettist in the school orchestra and then the first when the girl on whom I had my first schoolboy crush – Ann Warwick - left after completing her school certificate in fourth form as it was then called.

During the final two years of High School I also was able to join the Public Schools Concert Orchestra which rehearsed on Saturdays in the Education Department's Glebe premises which later moved to Blackfriars in Chippendale. I believe that none of those facilities or activities survive today.

Another distinct life benefit was seen in my first serious relationship with a fellow student – Margie Wait – who was and is an accomplished teacher, pianist and violinist.

Music was really providing more than just sweet sounds, if I bring to mind the lecture request as to reflecting life impacts and resonances.

From third form I had started actively composing my own music and that was to continue up until I was thirty or so. I loved writing music and will probably go back to it for personal pleasure at some time later in my life. I derived much pleasure from it but never regarded myself as a composer of any real distinction. I was in awe of others at that time with nascent friendships with Ross Edwards, Peter Sculthorpe and Nigel Butterly.

Peter was generous towards me especially when I went to university in 1970. He gave me, as he has done with so many others, enormous support and encouragement. He is a rare and wonderful giant in Australian music affairs.

In closely watching and speaking with Ross, Peter, Nigel, Richard Meale, Don Banks in the senior ranks and many of my young peers at that time - Richard Mills, Carl Vine, Moya Henderson, Gregg Howard, Vincent Plush and too many others to recall, I realised that one thing that drove us all was a very open and focussed approach to our work. There was a frankness about providing criticism and other feedback at times in ways that could only be described as being unusually direct.

I suppose that represents one of the next great life lessons from music. There is a degree of professional accountability for one's work and its content that can generate critical response in ways that can be quite character forming! And that is a very good thing and has influenced my life ever since. I have always been open to professional feedback and criticism and similarly have never been fearful to provide it. There can be no doubt that quality follows from the rigorous standards that apply in music - where criticism and critical engagement is part and parcel of the profession. The notion of absolute standards is central to mainstream western music cultures not only in classical music but in jazz, rock and roll and in popular light music.

It has always been my view that Australians generally do not receive criticism well and that our inability to receive criticism is matched only by our inability to give criticism in a way which is thoughtful, caring, constructive and nourishing. In music the situation is quite different because music is built on layers of disciplined study and the process of it requires that one develop a disciplined approach which not only welcomes criticism but actively seeks it out. Music and its health, like many of the arts is dependent on a fairly forensic approach to review and assessment.

The other life lesson I acquired in the process of my university study and the active community of composers and performers with whom I worked and studied was the need to recognise that there are no short cuts. It was hard work and required a lot of effort and a consistent quest for knowledge. You simply have to learn the repertoire – there is no way to avoid it.

One of the remarkable things about music and it is again a life lesson, is that a violinist in Sydney can meet one in Riga and they will both comfortably assume an equal familiarity with a vast body of repertoire as being core to the practise of their craft. It is something which in all the arts is probably only true of music and musicians. The discipline acquired in learning music – study, rehearsal, focussed effort on composition, intense concentration over many hours are the sort of life skills that travel with one forever. They are invaluable and have been central to the work ethic that has informed my life ever since.

It was in my period at University that I first started the discovery of management – I owe all my early experience of management to a diversity of experiences in promoting all manner of concerts from the preposterous to the transcendent.

First I was made the concert organiser of the International Society of Contemporary Music by that marvellous brilliant old scallywag – Professor Donald Peart – the inaugural Professor of Music at the University of Sydney. Donald and I had a tense but rich relationship and he inducted me to the experience of managing concerts, contracting musicians, scheduling rehearsals, running advertisements and selling the tickets.

Clearly he hated all that side of things and he left me and others pretty much to our own devices in putting events on. It was a real process of trial and error I can assure you and if the most valuable experience is as I believe, a catalogue of screw-ups then I had many rich experiences in that period. Ones I have never forgotten. It was also during the period at university that my understanding of the musics of the world expanded dramatically.

I learnt from a pair of brilliant ethno-musicologists - Willem and Rebecca Adriaansz-about Japanese Indian and Pakistani music. I learnt about Balinese and Javanese music and later I was to learn about an array of folk and other ethnic musics from William Mann on a scholarship in Holland. In parallel I learnt to like popular music from friends at the university and discovered the Beatles, the Stones and artists like Steve Winwood and Eric Clapton – who were pretty central to my taste back then. Subsequently I have discovered the joys of modern chanson and two of my favourite song writers of the twentieth century Cole Porter and Irving Berlin. And if there is one really great life lesson in music it is the lesson of the expansive tolerance and acceptance of many ways to express one self that is central to the experience and practise of it. Music and tolerance are close bedfellows.

Following university I had other managerial positions first at Young Opera, then at the NSW Conservatorium under Rex Hobcroft and as a member of the inaugural Music Board of the Australia Council. I then became the General Manager of Music Rostrum Australia of which Roger Woodward was the Artistic Director and Rex the Chairman. Rostrum ran a music festivals in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide in each of 1974 and 1975 and I still remember the feeling of creeping incapacity when one of our then Board Members - Donald McDonald – said “Kim we must have a detailed cashflow”. I replied “certainly Donald – as long as your first tell me what it is”. So it was through music when I was 22 that I first learnt about balance sheets and P&L’s (more L than P I am afraid to say) and about comprehensive budgeting and estimating. The festivals were a classic example of being thrown into deep water administratively. In fact were more like being thrown into a very distant part of the ocean. I rapidly learnt to swim administratively, so to speak.

Study and work followed in Italy with the late great composer Luciano Berio and the unforgettable mezzo soprano Cathy Berberian. Management in that period included a bunch of stuff with the Israel Chamber Orchestra and research and a substantial amount of work in the preparation of several recitals for Cathy – the first a history of singing and of composed song entitled *VocaLectuRecital* for the Holland Festival. The second a recital of music only by women entitled *Fine Women and Song!* And the last a recital built around folk music across the planet.

On returning to Australia I worked at Musica Viva for almost seven years and finished there as General Manager in early 1984. That period really rounded me as a manager. I had a fine mentor in Ken Tribe and will forever be grateful for his generosity in the counsel he has afforded me over half a lifetime.

I don’t think one can ever convey just how expansive the experience of arts management is generally and in particular how very demanding it was in Australia back in the 1970’s. Back then one had to be a jack of all trades. I learnt to be the programmer and planner, to do budgets, negotiate contracts, manage foreign currency, advocate sponsorship, develop marketing campaigns execute all the advertising – down to actually writing the ads and the

press kits. We all did it in the various arts companies back then. It was very much a do-it-yourself era. And boy did we work hard and learn hard.

There was a wonderfully generous camaraderie during that period in all the diverse companies and many of us from that time remain firm friends and colleagues today.

Colleagues were terrifically generous guides and I owe a lot to them for their patience and all that I was taught by so many different people. I think that generosity of spirit and openness to help and respond to the needs of others in the arts is one of my most treasured experiences from an active working life in the creative community.

At that time we shared a regular Saturday table at Pulcinella in Bayswater Road, Kings Cross and we would have animated exchanges with an open invitation for visitors in town and a range of colleagues around the arts community to come together and share ideas and have fun in each other's company. An enduring life lesson for me has been seen in that kind of mutually supportive spirit across the board in so many aspects of the arts community and there is much to be learnt from the selfless sense of community and interdependence that is reflected in it. I think it made many of us strong and resourceful managers and gave us confidence and resilience. I have many happy memories from that time.

I left Musica Viva to take up the position as CEO at the Australian Film Commission twenty one years ago. But within a year I was back as a board member - a position I only relinquished recently after twenty years including six as the Chairman. It has been my most enduring relationship with the performing arts and I love it as a company and cherish the chamber music literature more than any other.

You can't beat a good string quartet, quintet or sextet in my book. It is music making at its most precious: intimate, intense, conversational, fiery, dramatic and at times so ethereally beautiful that it simply and literally takes your breath away. I have derived more pleasure from the companionship of chamber music and musicians than any others and value and revere their efforts as peripatetic providers of comfort and solace to publics across this nation and around the world. They are very special people and I have never lost the thrill in listening to live performances by domestic and international quartets and other chamber configurations.

From working at the Australian Film Commission I have moved on to have a commercial business career in the film and television industries. And one incidental lesson there has been that few filmmakers really get music properly – the magical combination of Fellini and Nino Rota and a few other examples excepted.

The nature of my commercial work is and has always been very demanding. I believe that many of the leadership, management and to the extent that I have them, skills of persuasion are directly attributable to the discipline and experience of my music life in all its strands from school up until my early thirties. Moreover it was in the arts that I learnt to never ever give up. To keep on trying and to come at a problem from a variety of angles until a solution is found.

The arts in this country – frankly as in most countries - have a tough time of it. There is not enough money, the market is tough and the activity expensive because of the nature of Australia's demography and geography. However we have seen our creative community achieve a huge amount and as an Australian I take real pride in the breadth and quality of that achievement.

In music Musica Viva is celebrated internationally as the leading chamber music entrepreneur anywhere. The Sydney Symphony orchestra as but one example has so improved after the extended periods with Stuart Challender and Edo de Waart that it has been able to attract musicians of the quality of Lorin Maazel, Mariss Janssons and Charles Dutoit to our shores for thrilling performances.

The Festivals in each of the capital cities provide enormous stimulation and dynamic programming of a kind that is at the forefront of spectrum presentation. The Australian Chamber Orchestra has been hailed as the best chamber orchestra in the world by a publication no less august than the London Times – a paper with a long history of fine and serious music criticism.

Musica Viva has established the largest national program anywhere of performances integrated into school curricular with real professional musicians – a program devoted to the most neglected and powerless audience of all:- children.

Opera Australia and its Oz Opera achieve more with less funding than any other opera company. It has the highest ratio of box office revenue to operating budget of any major opera company.

The South Australian company has done the complete Ring not once but twice and in memorably original even dangerously adventurous productions.

The Goldner Quartet, Synergy, Taikoz and the Australia Ensemble and too many others to mention are working at the apex of performance achievement. Ross Edwards brilliant Oboe Concerto for Diana Dougherty was recently performed to a rapturous reception with Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. That concerto was of course commissioned by Andrew Kaldor for his wife Renata - a colleague of mine on the Sydney Opera House Trust. I still remember the first performance of it and the spine tingling joy it gave me and I believe every member in the audience on that memorable night.

These are great things in our country and they are all the product of tenacious conviction from exceptionally talented fellow Australians. Much that is done in our country is not acknowledged. None of it could happen without committed support and education.

Personally Music is the great energiser. It provides a balance in life that for me is as central to survival as breathing. Michael Steinberg the Musicologist, writer, lecturer, critic, chamber music coach and narrator in his 2001 Stuart Challender Memorial Lecture quoted from the poem JOY by the American Liesel Mueller in which she describes music so exquisitely:

It's about
two seemingly parallel lines
suddenly coming together
inside us, in some place
that is still wilderness.

I think that is pretty much on the mark.

So that has been a rather circuitous route to reveal some of that which Katherine and Mary asked of me. Hopefully showing that my early arts education has had an enduring impact on my life and the shape of the way in which I approach things.

It is fashionable today to defend music education by saying that it assists students in other skills such as language, mathematics and the other sciences. And that is undoubtedly true. For example, Nicole Kidman said of her research for the fine Sydney Pollack film, "The Interpreter", premiered at the Sydney Opera House this week, that it surprised her enormously that most of the interpreters she met in the U.N. played a musical instrument.

We should use all available arguments to defend and promote the fundamental need for formal and comprehensive music education from the commencement of primary education. But I have to tell you that it saddens me to think that we are increasingly compelled to defend music by reference to other impacts rather than to reference music itself.

Music is good for one. Period.

It is good for the soul.

It is good for human tolerance.

It opens one's perception.

It frees one's mind.

It reinforces our capacity to feel and understand.

The feelings released by music and the devotion to beauty it represents are probably some of the most positive noble life affirming outcomes in the diversity of all human activity. The communication between composer, performer and audience, dancer or sole listener on a walkman is of unique value. Each music experience is an end in and of itself of special qualities that are ineffable.

Put at its most simple I can't imagine life without it – it has made me who I am.

Kim Williams

April, 2005