

# Articulation

Newsletter of the Sydney Chapter of the  
Musicological Society of Australia

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## CONVENOR'S REPORT: GRADUATE MUSIC SYMPOSIUM

held 15 September 2001 at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

The Graduate Music Symposium this year produced eight papers of quality, chaired in three sessions. The Keynote Address was delivered by Dr Sally Macarthur from the University of Western Sydney and Rosemary Schaffler, Pastoral Leader and Counsellor. Their paper, 'Visions of a new spirituality in Australia: the music of Anne Boyd', addressed issues of contemporary Australian society, epitomising the materialism that has swept the Western world since the post-enlightenment. Calling on work by David Tacey, they addressed the emerging of a new spirituality, finding expression in the creative works of Australian artists, writers and musicians. Macarthur and Schaffler argued that the music of Australian composer Anne Boyd gives expression to such a spirituality. In their abstract, they stated that Boyd's preoccupation in her music 'has been with the meeting of Christian love and Buddhist silence. She draws on Asian sources (such as texts, music and modes) and on early Christian sources (in particular, the medieval church modes and the diatonic system).' Their paper included musical excerpts from *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* (1975), the third song from *Cycle of Love* (1981) and a recent work, *A Vision: Jesus reassures his Mother* (1999).

The first paper session, chaired by Peter McCallum, included four papers. Masters student Gabriel Griffiths is working on Handel's Italian chamber cantatas from 1706–1710. As part of her research, she presented a paper entitled 'The early dramatic technique of Handel: an examination of form and tonality as dramatic structures in the chamber cantata *Agrippina condotta a morire* (1709)'. Lynne Murray is doing a Master of Music (Performance) at Sydney Conservatorium. In her paper, 'The Use of Vibrato', Lynne examined the use of continuous vibrato in singing as discussed in the singing treatises of Johann Friedrich Agricola and Manuel Garcia fils, two important pieces of documentary evidence relating to vocal performance practice in the period 1750 to 1850. Her paper also examined whether there was a discernible change in attitude to the use of vibrato in vocal music over this period. Lynne presents a summary of her paper in this issue of *Articulation*. Jenny Butler is a PhD student at the University of New South Wales. She presented a paper entitled '*The Miser as Opera Buffa*: a Study in Early Russian Comic Opera'. Her paper introduced a little-known area of eighteenth century opera, *The Miser* and its composer, before considering Taruskin's classification of the work as a *comédie mêlée d'ariettes*, and offering a more liberating interpretation of it as *opera buffa*. The final paper in this session was delivered by Anton Luiten, A PhD student at the Sydney Conservatorium. His paper 'Large and Small Scale Considerations in the Drafting of Bartók's Sketches for *String Quartet no. 6*' set out to illustrate, details of thematic function in the first movement by following early drafts and fragments. The paper also illustrated important charac-

Graduate Music  
Symposium

New URL for  
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Continuous  
vibrato in vocal  
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1850

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receives  
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teristics inherent in Bartók's compositional process and highlights significant changes made to the draft that re-shaped the final version.

In the second session, chaired by Aline Scott-Maxwell, PhD student Emmanuel Schmidt presented a paper entitled 'Effects Of A Balanced Conception On The Communicative Potential Of Jazz Performance'. Emmanuel's research focuses on listener's perceptions of musical events in jazz performance. He argues that, in their assessment of a performance and its communicative factors, jazz listeners directly or indirectly refer to the performer's conception of balance in relation to the aspects which determine a performer's 'own voice'.

The final session, chaired by Richard Toop, included three papers. James Humberstone from Sydney University presented a paper entitled 'David Ahern: An International Context'. James has accessed new material from Ahern's estate including correspondence from composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Rolf Gehlhaar and Cornelius Cardew. This paper drew some interesting comparisons between the repertoire of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and Ahern's AZ Music. James Humberstone has begun this year to paint an oral history of the period. PhD student Terumi Narushima from Sydney Conservatorium presented a paper called '*Tritriadic Chimes* - bells in just intonation'. This paper explored the presenter's sound installation, first presented at MicroFest 2001 in Claremont, California as a set of chimes that rang on the hour. The work is realised using Csound synthesis software which provides the ability to create bell timbres that are not found in a conventional carillon. The final paper from Jane Stanley explored '*Bricolage* in the Music of Elena Kats-Chernin'. Her paper focused on the use of musical 'found objects' identified as quotation of pre-existing music in pieces such as *The Schubert Blues* (1996) and *Iphis* (1997).

This was an engrossing day. The Sydney chapter had tried to find a common date with our near neighbours in Canberra, but had encountered obstacles from semesters which are packed with dates. It is to be hoped that we may be able to offer combined Graduate Music Symposiums again in the future. In the meantime it was a pleasure to hear the variety of work being done in Musicology from different locations in the surroundings of the newly refurbished Conservatorium.

**Articulation**, the newsletter of the Sydney Chapter of the Musicological Society of Australia, is published three times a year, in March, July and November.

This issue was prepared by Terry Clinton, Gabriel Griffiths and Adrian Renzo. Design and layout are by Caitlin Rowley.

Contributions from all sources are welcome, from short articles to information on upcoming events that may be of interest to MSA members.

For ease of handling, the best way to submit material is via email to either Terry Clinton or Caitlin Rowley. Telephone enquiries may be made to Terry Clinton or Adrian Renzo.

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## CHAPTER WEBSITE GETS NEW ADDRESS

Due to a change in the way that our website hosting service, Geocities, names its sites, the Sydney Chapter's website has undergone a very welcome change of URL. The new address is:

[http://www.geocities.com/msa\\_sydney](http://www.geocities.com/msa_sydney)

While the site has not been updated as regularly as we would like in recent months, work is underway to update the Articulation archive, and to keep the pages as fresh as possible. In particular, we are always keen to receive notification of events which Chapter members are involved in or which may interest them—if you receive information about such an event, please send the details to Caitlin Rowley at [carowley@comcen.com.au](mailto:carowley@comcen.com.au), or leave a message by phone at 0407 953 224.

# THE USE OF VIBRATO: CONTINUOUS VIBRATO IN VOCAL MUSIC 1750–1850

This is the summary of a paper given by Lynne Murray at the Graduate Symposium held at the Sydney Conservatorium on 15 September 2001.

This paper examines the use of continuous vibrato in vocal music in the period 1750 to 1850 according to two important pieces of documentary evidence relating to vocal performance practice, the singing treatises of Johann Friedrich Agricola (1757) and Manuel Garcia fils (1840s).

In my view an analysis of documentary sources should be based on an understanding of vibrato's physical causes and of the difference between vibrato, tremolo, and wobble, yet an examination of modern views by scholars who are in the main not singers reveals a confusing array of opinions that are rarely well founded, due to their lack of understanding of the vocal mechanism and misinterpretations of the terminology.

Vibrato is due to pulsations in the larynx which occur when there is an equilibrium between the muscles of the larynx and the muscles which manage the breath. Vibrato is heard by the ear as part of the timbre of the voice, as at a certain speed individual oscillations appear to merge into one rich sound. Oscillations perceptible to the ear indicate imbalances in the functioning of the vocal mechanism. Too fast a rate of undulation is heard as a tremble ('tremolo') and too slow a rate as a wobble. Both conditions are capable of correction.

In my view neither Agricola's nor Garcia's treatise advocated a lack of vibrato in artistic singing. Both were famous singing teachers, both worked closely with the greatest singers of their time, and their treatment of the physiognomy of the voice suggest a strong understanding of the way the voice works. Garcia's comment that 'the voice can vibrate only thanks to the brilliance of the timbre and the power of the emission of the air, and not by the effect of the tremor,' coupled with his frequent references to the vibration of the glottis indicates that he was aware that a trained, well functioning voice naturally vibrates. Agricola mentions vibrato only once: 'The vibrato on one note... is also an ornament that in singing is especially effective on long sustained notes.' However he adds that 'not all throats are capable of this type of execution', which suggests that he could not have been referring to vibrato in the modern understanding of the term, because as a pre-eminent singing teacher he would have known that any voice can be taught to function with vibrato.

My view is that apparent references to vibrato actually refer to an aspect of singing technique which is now almost defunct, the ability to sing fast repeated notes. This makes sense of Agricola's discussion of a vibrato on one note that 'gently beats' but does not change the pitch. It also makes sense of Garcia's 'drawing out the tone with inflections or echoes, and through rapid repetitions' which he refers to as 'vibrare la voce' but which does not gel with a description of normal pitch vibrato or indeed of any commonly used ornament.

This is an area which requires further research, but I believe it could have important implications for the reconstruction of 18th and 19th century vocal performance practice.

## 'CHAPTER MEMBER RECEIVES DOCTORATE

MSA Sydney Chapter member Nigel Nettheim was conferred with his PhD by the University of New South Wales on 4 May.

Dr Nettheim's thesis, completed with revisions during 2000, is titled 'Schubert's Early Progress: On the Internal Evidence of his Compositions up to *Gretchen am Spinnrade*'.

The following is a section of the abstract:

'Franz Schubert (1797–1828) left many musical scores containing his earliest compositional efforts. Here "earliest" is taken, for convenience, to refer to the works from the first extant (1810) up to and including the lied *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1814), his first generally recognised masterpiece.'

'This dissertation tells the story tracing those efforts in a chronological series of analytical essays. The essays mention only incidentally the external evidence of the home environment, lessons received, concerts attended, and so on, but refer instead primarily to the internal evidence of the compositions themselves, that is, the notes on the page. That story has not previously been told in these terms. The dissertation is thus a contribution to musical analysis applied to a quite important and certainly instructive but very little-known repertoire.'

'An essential feature is that the story proceeds chronologically, to the (fairly large) extent that the exact chronology is known. Over a hundred works are involved, some containing several movements, so the story is necessarily long. Further, music is by no means a simple phenomenon, so the story is necessarily detailed. Another feature contributes to the tracing of the skein of anticipations of resources used in Schubert's later and more famous works, as well as to the evidence of derivation from models of other composers' works.'

Dr Nettheim's research now is taking some different directions.

'The area of the thesis is not currently my main field of activity,' he said. 'That covers two topics: (1) the study of the playing of the early pianist Vladimir de Pachmann (1848–1933), and (2) the notion of Gustav Becking, in his 1928 book, of an internalised conducting shape associated with the music of different composers, nationalities and historical times.'

Some material on these topics can be seen on Dr Nettheim's website:

<http://users.bigpond.net.au/nettheim>