

# North Queensland Recorder Society Newsletter

October 2013

## Next Play Day

The next play day will be on Sunday 3 November, 2.00 – 4.30. It will be held at St Joseph's on the Strand. The entrance to the school and hall is in Fryer St: the Music Room is in the large multicoloured building.

The leader for this play day is Patricia Reynolds. Patricia's theme is 'fact and fantasy'.

Please bring recorders, music stands, something to share for afternoon tea and payment to cover the expenses of the day (\$5 for adults and \$2 for children).

At this play day our President Ian will be officially launching the new web site. Have a sneak preview at [www.nqrs.org.au](http://www.nqrs.org.au).

## Weekend Workshop 2013

By Ian Montgomery

This year we made a few changes to the format of the annual Weekend Workshop. These were

- Moved it to coincide with the Australian Festival of Chamber Music at the end of July
- Reduced the number of levels from three to two
- Simplified the workshop structure by eliminating combinations of levels

The change in timing was to encourage visitors from outside Townsville to attend the workshop, the Festival and North Queensland in winter.

The workshop was well advertised through the Armidale Music course in January, to members of the Early Music Society and through the Sydney and Canberra recorder societies. The final make-up of the workshop was 19 local registrations, 1 Queenslander from outside Townsville, 2 registrations from Victoria and 4 from NSW.

The levels of expertise were based on ensemble playing rather than recorder playing skills and designated beginner-intermediate and intermediate-advanced. Having fewer levels meant that we needed fewer support tutors so participants spent more time with the lead tutor. It also reduced costs and allowed support tutors to participate more in the workshops.

We had a change of venue this year to St Joseph's School in Fryer Street near the Strand. This has similar excellent facilities to St Joseph's Mundingburra, previously used, but is in a more convenient location with respect to accommodation and eating places.



This year our lead tutor was the hugely popular Ruth Wilkinson from Melbourne. This was her third time with us and she is well-known to Armidale workshop participants and music students at the University of Melbourne. Ruth's speciality is baroque music and she gives many concerts playing recorder or viola de gamba. Ruth was

supported by local tutors Heather Coleman, Malcolm Tattersall and Valerie Huston.

Ruth performed her usual magic in leading the groups to enrich and refine their performances of even quite simple music by improving interpretation and phrasing.



The change in timing allowed Ruth to perform in the Australian Festival of Chamber Music. The Festival invited Ruth and NQRS to participate in the performance of Britten's *Noye's Fludde* on the final Saturday afternoon, a performance that provided the Festival with a capacity audience. [Editor's note Ian has promised us an account of playing in *Noye's Fludde* for the November/December issue of the newsletter].

On the final evening of the workshop, the usual 'show and tell' concert was followed by Ruth and Cynthia O'Brien playing a delightful baroque Concert à Deux in the beautiful St Joseph's Church with Cynthia playing baroque violin and Ruth recorder and viola de gamba



The Committee agreed that the changes in timing and structure were a success and will be repeated next year. The dates planned for 2014 are Saturday and Sunday 9 and 10 August.

### **Ruth Wilkinson talks to Piers Lane**

Piers Lane's Concert Conversations on the morning of Friday August 2<sup>nd</sup> included a conversation with Ruth Wilkinson. For those who could not be there, here is a summary of how it went.

Piers started by saying that an approach by NQRS prompted him to think of including Ruth, a recorder player, in the program and, in developing that thought, of using Ruth in *Noyes Fludde* as part of the centenary celebration for Benjamin Britten; not only the first appearance of recorders in the Australian Festival of Chamber Music but also the first chamber opera.

Ruth talked about her early musical education in piano at Queensland University and that she had also played the double bass, having been selected for that at school because 'she was tall and had long fingers'. Although she had played recorder from childhood and enjoyed it and its repertoire, she was essentially self-taught on the instrument when, following her music degree, she moved to the

Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basle (or Basel) to study recorder seriously. Here she also took up the violone and funded herself by playing double bass in what she described as 'semi-professional' orchestras.

When she began to think about her long term career she decided to come home to Australia, because of the Australian sense of humour. She started a mediaeval ensemble and was quickly involved in teaching and in playing in ensembles, including those organised by Musica Viva, newly interested in older music.

Ruth plays with many ensembles and at many festivals both at home and overseas. She particularly mentioned her travels to Spain and Portugal with baroque violinist Cynthia O'Brien and the wonderful experience of playing twelfth century music in a twelfth century church. She also mentioned the experience of recording inside a mediaeval church in Tuscany taking advantage of the entirely different sound generated in such a building compared with the controlled environment of a recording studio.

The NQRS is grateful to Piers Lane and to the Board of the Australian Chamber Music Festival for so enthusiastically picking up our suggestions and providing us with

## **Testing Times**

By Malcolm Tattersall

### **(1) AMEB examination results**

Recorders were well represented in the September AMEB woodwind exams and got good results. These children deserve our congratulations:

Grade 1: Jade Abrahams and Mia Partlett, both Honours.

Grade 2: Thomas Gray, Callum Miller and Lauren Atkinson, Honours; Anthony Minehan and Isabella Dowling, Credit.

Grade 3: Maya Miller, Lachlan Carey, Zoe Jenkins and Julian

Brescianini, Honours; Craig Mahy, Credit.

Grade 4: Hana Batt, Honours; Jackson Moline, Credit.

Grade 6: Sabrina Wightman, Credit.

It is worth noting that exams below Grade 5 can be done on either soprano or alto or both, and that many of the Grade 2 – 4 candidates did accept the challenge of playing both sizes of recorder in their exams.

Congratulations also to Heather Coleman and Sr Valerie Huston, who taught all but one of the above candidates (the odd one out was my lone candidate) and sent me their results. If we have missed any, please let Jean know so they can be recognized similarly. As Heather said when she sent me her students' results, it's great for all of us as teachers and players to know that recorder is going so well.

Next year we have the option of doing exams in May as well as September, giving both teachers and students the chance of a decent gap between exams and the (sometimes frantic) Eisteddfod period.

## **(2) Eisteddfod results**

I must thank Heather and Valerie for sending me their students' results and apologise for any errors: teachers tend to scribble results on the nearest bit of paper as they are announced and interpreting them afterwards can be difficult. In any case, here are the results to the best of my knowledge.

**Recorder solo 12 years and under:** congratulations to Hana Batt, who deserved and received first prize for her Marcello sonata; to Zoe Jenkins, Lachlan Carey 2nd & Sofia Brescianini, equal 2<sup>nd</sup>; and to Julian Brescianini and Maya Miller, equal 3rd (apologies if minor placings are not quite correct).

All the other competitors received "Highly Commended" awards and they do deserve our commendation for, firstly, their willingness to take on the challenge and, secondly, some very good performances on the day. I haven't got a complete list but Anthony Minehan, Callum James, Curtis James, Michelle Cox, James Paterson, Daniel Franetovich, Lauren Atkinson and Jackson Moline were amongst them.

**Woodwind solo 16-18 yrs** Sabrina Wightman 3rd

**Australian composer 18 yrs & under** The new solo section for

"Music by an Australian Composer", for players under 18, attracted seven entries - all woodwind players, as it happened, but still diverse: recorders (Jackson, playing my "Clowns", and Hana, playing a slow movement by Aked), flutes (two jazzy pieces by Kerin Bailey), one clarinet (another jazzy piece), one bassoon (playing a slow movement similar to Hana's) and a bagpiper playing what must be almost the only Aussie composition for his instrument. He was awarded first place for it, with Hana (equal 3rd) and the two flutes taking the other minor placings. The recorder players deserve congratulations, since they both played very well, but they would have been a bit optimistic to expect to win, since they were two of the youngest players in the section.

**Instrumental Duet Yr 7 & under** HC: Julian & Sofia Brescianini, Lauren Atkinson & Isabella Dowling, Elliot Basso & Oscar Dohnalek. Merit: Bayden Hardy & Thomas Carey, Daniel Franetovich & Jarren Walker.

**Instrumental trio 18yr & under** Sabrina Wightman, Georgina Wightman and Hana Batt 2nd.

**Instrumental Quartet Yr 7 & under** HC: Callum James, Curtis James, Angus Horlock and James Oh.

**Recorder Group Yr 7 & under** 1st St Joseph's Mundingburra, equal 2nd St Joseph's the Strand and Grammar Junior

**Instrumental ensemble, 5 - 12 players, primary:** Marian School won both halves of this double section, with the Joanne McCluskey's guitar group taking first place in one and my own woodwind group taking first in the other.

The competitors in this section are quite varied, comprising small concert bands and string orchestras (competing here rather than against bigger groups of the same kind in other sections), woodwind ensembles, guitar ensembles and more. My woodwind ensemble this year was an oddity, even in such a section, because it mixed recorders and flutes. They played the last movement of my recorder arrangement of a Mozart Divertimento, with flutes on the tenor parts and soprano, alto and bass recorders on their normal lines.

## Judging the Judge

By Malcolm Tattersall

After every Eisteddfod I have been concerned with, performers and their parents have expressed various levels of confusion, anger and disbelief about the adjudication, while teachers have (privately) often done the same although with rather different criticisms. This year's Eisteddfod was no different, and I thought it was worth discussing the factors playing out in this very artificial performance setting.

1. Adjudicator's preferences, priorities and biases. This is the big one, of course. Not as unfair as they are often made out to be, they are nevertheless unavoidable and do affect results. Here are some of them:

- Weighting of accuracy of the performance vs difficulty of the piece.
- Weighting of stylishness and expressiveness vs accuracy.
- Weighting of tuning, tempo, rhythmic accuracy, articulation against each other.
- Weighting of presentation (stage manners, etc.) vs content (the music).
- The adjudicator's view about whether some instruments are "harder to play" than others. [Recorders can suffer here.]
- Whether ensembles should be given extra credit for performing without a conductor.
- Whether soloists should be given extra credit for performing from memory.
- Whether a competitor who is much younger than most in the section should be given extra credit for playing well for his/her age.

*These are all factors about which the adjudicator has every right to decide* and just listing them makes it easier to see why results can seem inconsistent or wrong even though they're not.

There are other factors about which the adjudicator may be biased (disliking particular musical styles, for instance) or lack expertise

(technique of particular instruments, for instance). This is regrettable but few of us are perfect and adjudicators are as human as anyone else.

2. Listeners' preferences, priorities and biases are more significant than they are often made out to be and affect perceptions of fairness. In other words, each of us as a listener has just as many biases as the adjudicator. If they happen to align, the listener will say something like, "What a wonderfully perspicacious adjudicator!" and go away happy. If they don't, the listener may say something like, "My *dog* has more musical intelligence than that tin-eared idiot in the middle of the hall!" and go away muttering revenge.

3. There is another group of factors which is not usually very significant and is essentially random:

- Human error: very rarely, it seems, someone gets a name or number muddled.
- Coincidence: if three competitors all happen to play the same piece in an open-choice section, they can be compared more easily than if they play contrasting pieces.
- Order of performance: a good performance may seem better if it follows a really bad one than if it follows another good one.

**With all the above in mind**, I tell my students – and anyone else who will listen – that their Eisteddfod performance is not a normal performance because its goal is not to entertain the listeners, and music should always be about the pleasure it brings to performers and audience. Furthermore, that if they play well they should get a place and if they don't they shouldn't, but that specific placings might as well be totally random and any six different adjudicators would award six different sets of results.

As it happens, I agreed with this year's adjudicator at about that level: my notional top placings in sections I heard agreed with hers fairly well, although some particular rankings differed. And I might have made more of an effort to separate the lower-ranked competitors and give them more useful feedback, but she would probably argue that making them feel good about playing by awarding all those "Highly Commended" certificates was more important.

And she, after all, was the adjudicator. Anyone who is not prepared to accept the rules and results of a competition should go busking

instead, or put on a concert in an old people's home, and bring happiness to everyone concerned!

## **Membership of North Queensland Recorder Society**

Are you a financial member? The membership year runs from the first of January.

Benefits of membership include

- Reduction in fees for workshops and other Society activities
- Access to the Society's library. (Members can receive a copy of the library catalogue as a CD or as an email attachment on request).
- Guaranteed receipt of newsletters.
- Opportunities to be involved in organising and deciding on Society activities

Membership fees: \$20 (Adult), students free.

## **Contacts for the Society**

**General enquiries** [info@nqrs.org.au](mailto:info@nqrs.org.au)

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