

Dandenong Ranges Orchestra

Music Director's Report 2015

This has been another successful year for the orchestra. We played five concerts in five venues and feedback from audiences was very positive. I am always surprised at how it all comes together at each concert after some fairly ordinary rehearsals. There were occasional problems, partly due to insufficient rehearsal times between concerts. This year the committee decided to reduce the number of concerts to four, at the end of each term, allowing for 10 rehearsals. Unfortunately, because Easter is earlier than usual, this term is only 7 weeks long so we may need to prune the program.

Membership has settled at about 35 and some sections have increased in number, such as violins and violas. We still have the usual vacancies and these will increase as some members leave. This makes it difficult to choose appropriate repertoire and cover all the missing instruments. The Victorian Music Library is still closed and we continue to be very dependent on the website IMSLP. I recommend that we take out a small subscription to help that group stay afloat. My thanks to Anne and Keith for their patient response to my continued demands for parts and transpositions.

Some of the concert highlights deserve special mention:

In May, our guest artist, Mary Knights-Rutten dazzled us with a movement from a Haydn piano concerto. Rebecca continued to develop her conducting skills with the strings and Bernie worked his magic with the winds.

In our June concert we played some new works but, because of shortage of rehearsals, we had to recycle three pieces from the previous concert. However, we can be proud of successfully coping with three quite difficult items by Rossini, Gershwin and Prokofiev. Thanks to Elisabeth for her beautiful playing in Debussy's Clair de Lune.

Our guest artist in August was harpist Huhana Rae who I am pleased to call on every time there are harp parts in our program. She also played some delicate solos. One of our policies is to encourage local composers and in this concert we were pleased to perform pieces by Rebecca Marshall and Jessamie Kaitler.

In October, Rebecca was both soloist and director in a movement from a Haydn violin concerto and she carried it off beautifully. Some of the other pieces tested our abilities but we will regard them as learning experiences. And the audience loved The Pirates of the Caribbean, especially our brilliant percussion section.

The highlights of the December concert were produced by our guest artists. Schubert's Shepherd on the Rock featured soprano Veronica Mitchell, clarinetist (and previous DRO trainee conductor) Sam Curkpatrick and our own pianist Elisabeth Middleton. Then an added delight was a duet of Vaughan Williams songs by Sam and his lovely wife, oboist Rachel Curkpatrick. Unfortunately, we were not able to recruit our occasional choir due to absences, but there were some strong voices in the audience during the carols and the Halleluiah Chorus.

Our first concert for 2016 will feature a new piece for soprano, harp and orchestra by local composer Jacqui Rutten which I think you will find unusual but accessible. And, in another piece, there will be an opportunity to hear Miranda play her new Cor Anglais. We'll have to work hard to cope with the whole program but I'm sure we can do it.

I have informed the committee that this will be my last year as music director. After the March concert I will resign as soon as a replacement has been appointed. I have really enjoyed working with the orchestra and individual members but, after 16 years, it's time for someone else to bring a new approach. Thanks to the committee for their work and I hope the orchestra goes from strength to strength. I will still be a member in the second violins.

John Collins

February 2016