**Geelong Chamber Music Society, Inc.**

**Annual General Meeting, 2022 : President’s Report**

*2021 in review*

Preparing a Report for the Geelong Chamber Music Society on our 2021 Season feels very much like writing the script for that famous episode of *Yes Minister* about the hospital with no patients. For, as members will realise, 2021 was the plague year in which we had to cancel all concerts scheduled for McAuley Hall.

These serial cancellations were disappointing for the Committee, three of whom – Anne Powers, David Fox and Judith Trimble -- bore the brunt of the large task of refunding tickets or transferring those funds as donations to performers. Our disappointment was shared by our scheduled performers and by our audience.

Although we lacked income from ticket sales, we did hold several thousand dollars from the Creative Communities Grant awarded by the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG). City Council encouraged us to use those funds to support local musicians. We achieved that objective in two ways.

1. *Melbourne Digital Concert Hall*

GCMS sponsored a “Geelong Night” on the Melbourne Digital Concert Hall, which from 2020 had proved such a creative response to the cancellation of live concerts generally. On March 18 local performers Sally Wilson (soprano) accompanied by Mark Kruger (piano) presented one recital, while Evergreen Ensemble, led by Shane Lestideau, followed with another.

Our musicians were glad to be performing on what had become a national platform and were well-received by their virtual audience. We believe the initiative brought wider attention to the depth of musical talent in Geelong and the region.

1. *Summer Concerts in the Geelong Botanic Gardens*

Our remaining Council funds supported two free public concerts in the Geelong Botanic Gardens.

On January 23 the ensemble performing was *Trio Oceanique* (Olivier Bonnici, violin; Jenny Ingram, viola; Siobhan O’Shaughnessy, cello) with Brighid Mantelli (flute). We believe that the number attending this performance was more than 120.

On February 6 we were entertained by *Evergreen Ensemble* (Shane Lestideau, baroque violin, artistic director; Claire Patti, voice and Celtic harp; Ryan Williams, recorders; and Nicholas Pollock, theorbo). For this concert the headcount of audience numbers was greater than 160.

At both concerts our musicians engaged directly with their appreciative audience in this attractive space. We’re grateful to Ashley Filipovski, Director of the Geelong Botanic Gardens, and his team for assistance with the organisation of the concerts. David Fox led our side of the organisation, with support from Committee colleagues, and we thank him for seeing this initiative through so successfully.

Given the enthusiastic public response to this year’s experiment, the Committee has decided to organise a similar concert next Summer.

*2022 Series*

In a triumph of 2022 hope over 2021 experience, GCMS returned to McAuley Hall on March 4 for our first concert in this year’s season.

Fittingly, for a resumption of live concerts our performers were the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra – the ensemble that had performed at the Society’s inaugural concert in April 2009.

MCO treated us to a delightful selection of classical works from Vienna: Haydn, Vanhal, Mozart, Dittersdorf. The irrepressible Stefan Cassomenos was soloist in piano concerti by Mozart and by Haydn, both No 8 in their composer’s catalogue and both in C major. Stefan also performed an amusing short work of his own, *Piano concerto No 5*.

Audience numbers for this concert were low: we sold 87 tickets, which is slightly less than half our customary “house.” This we regard as evidence of continuing Covid-19 hesitancy among our audience. But whatever was lacking in numbers was more than made up for in the enthusiastic appreciation accorded our ensemble and soloist alike. The audience response indicated how much the joy of live performance had been missed in preceding months, and of how superb musicianship prompts spontaneous and grateful responses in our audience. Our first concert for the year gives us much on which to build.

*Musica Viva in Schools*

Throughout 2021 Judith Trimble worked diligently with our colleagues at Musica Viva in Schools (MViS), expecting to present a program in St Francis Xavier Primary School, Corio. Once again, restrictions imposed by the pandemic thwarted best-laid plans and the program had to be postponed until 2022.

We’re grateful to Judith and to MViS for continuing to work on expanding musical education in our community, especially among disadvantaged schools.

*Bay City Strings and MCO Masterclasses*

Judith Trimble also tends our association with the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra to bering an annual masterclass with professional musicians to strings students in Geelong and the region.

While that initiative was placed on hold in 2021, we are all hopeful that in May this year both Bay City Strings and the Geelong Youth Orchestra will benefit from a masterclass with MCO to be conducted at Geelong High School.

*Australian Youth Classical Music Competition : the Helen Jordan Prize*

One venture that did come to fruition amid last year’s lockdown was the AYCMC’s regional prize competition. GCMS sponsors the First Prize in this division, known now as the Helen Jordan Prize.

We congratulate Harrison Steele-Holmes (trombone) upon his success in this competition. Harrison has already performed with the Geelong Symphony Orchestra and we wish him continuing success in his endeavours.

*City of Greater Geelong Creative Communities Grants for 2022*

The Committee applied for one of the Grants provided under the City of Greater Geelong’s “Creative Communities” scheme for 2022. That scheme has generously assisted our programs for nearly a decade. For 2022 all grants were awarded to individuals and organisations that had not previously received support from this fund, so GCMS was unsuccessful.

City Council has recently announced a new fund, the 2021-22 COVID-19 Arts, Culture and Heritage Grants, to assist artists and artistic organisations to recover from adverse impacts of Covid-19. The Committee has applied for assistance through this initiative. Even modest support would help greatly as we re-engage with our audience and recover from the revenue drought of 2020 and 2021.

*The Committee*

I was unexpectedly ordered below decks for a couple of months from late December 2021, so have even more reason than usual to be conscious of, and grateful for, the harmonious collegiality and hard work of our GCMS Committee.

Vice-President David Fox is our publicity guru, whose talent is evident in our posters, flyers, programs, website and *Pivotonian* advertisements. David also manages our database and on-line communications with members. His command of these mysteries simply leaves his colleague in awe. David is also our liaison with AYCMC, to our mutual benefit.

Secretary Irene McGinnigle deals with all the stuff that most of her colleagues find wearisome: preparing Agendas and Minutes; coping with Correspondence; and keeping track of statutory requirements for registration, insurance and so on. From her own concert-going and contacts with musicians and agents, she maintains a promising list of potential performers that has enriched our programs.

Treasurer Anne Powers brings all of her skills as a professional accountant to bear in managing the Society’s finances. Her Report to this meeting will again demonstrate that, hard times notwithstanding, she has us in a secure position. Her role imposed a very heavy burden during the cancellations of concerts and we’re all grateful to Anne for leading the team who dealt with our responsibilities following those upsets.

Jan Lavelle is our COVID-19 Co-ordinator, ensuring that all of our activities are consistent with the Society’s Covid-safe Principles and Policies, and that these are kept up-to-date with changing public health mandates. In 2022 her work on this front is simply indispensable. As well, Jan’s meticulous attention to detail is reflected in her attention to our contracts with performing artists and ensembles. Again, Jan’s contribution to the Committee ensures that our concert series can proceed.

Judith Trimble‘s work on our community outreach programs with MViS and MCO Masterclasses has already been noted. Many members will have had direct contact with Judith as she looks after our engagement with individual donors, bringing her customary warmth and care to that important task.

As well as thanking our Committee most warmly, I would also like to pay tribute to the generosity of the Society’s donors. Our ability to plan a season for 2022, and – especially – our commitment to broader involvement in AYCMC, MViS and the MCO Masterclasses has only been possible because of our donors’ support. Music-making and music education are the beneficiaries of this continuing commitment, and the Committee records our gratitude to all who assist us so generously.

Hugh Collins

President

17.iii.2022