



Plucked Strings

A quarterly newsletter for FAME members

www.fame.asn.au

Editor: Marie Schulz marie@conceptual.net.au

June 2015

June 2015

Orchestra Reports

pages 2 - 8

New from Schulzwerke ~

page 8

Mandolins Victoria ~

page 9

Interview with Werner Ruecker ~

pages 10 - 13

Collection of mandolins for sale ~

page 14

But Does it *Sound* Good?

by Keith Harris

pages 15 - 18

President's Report?

Not this time - he's away on leave. But you will hear from him at the Special General Meeting of FAME to be held during the Sydney Festival next week.

In This Issue....

- ~ Especially relevant for those of you who will be attending the Festival in Sydney, a very interesting interview with Werner Ruecker. Find out who you will be working with.
- ~ Mandolins Victoria is holding it's inaugural kids workshop.
- ~ There are always interesting bits of information in the orchestra reports. Read about Auckland's sectional rehearsals for sorting out difficult bits and improving technique. A great idea for encouraging newer players.
- ~ A private collection of 16 mandolins is offered for sale.

**Articles for next edition due
14th September**

Canberra Mandolin Orchestra

Recent performances

The CMO followed up our exciting start to the year at *Luminus Botanicus* with two performances with a distinct Mediterranean theme.

The first was an evening of music for the Greek National Day at a reception and dinner in the elegant surrounds of the Ambassador's residence in leafy Yarralumla. The embassy suggested some new pieces which we arranged.



The CMO and singer Theodora Volti at the Greek Ambassador's residence.

We then moved westward along the Mediterranean for the Canberra Country Women's Association International Day Italian lunch performing a suite of pieces from our Italian repertoire. We were delighted to have orchestra member Larry Mays back playing in the first mandolin section for this gig as well as singing the *Deh Vieni alla Finestra* aria by Mozart accompanied by Ian Bull on solo mandolin. Larry has a beautiful opera trained voice and is currently working on a PhD in early Italian music.

It was a very successful concert (and the CWA desserts were awesome!).

Unfortunately one of our life members and stalwart of the first mandolin section, Louise Ibbotson, took ill and had to be taken to hospital. At the time of writing Louise is recovering in hospital and we wish her a speedy recovery.

This was followed barely a fortnight later with a performance of traditional Greek music for around 350 members and guests of the Hellenic Club, most composed by the legendary 'Golden Greeks' – Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis.

Guitarist/mandolinist David Wardle arranged six new pieces for this concert, with mandolinists Heather Powrie and Ian Bull working on others.

Three Greek singers performed most of the numbers accompanied by the CMO who also played some instrumental pieces to an enthusiastic audience who joined in spontaneously. Our conductor, Michael Sollis, kept the audience amused between numbers with his brave attempts to pronounce the tongue twisting (for English speakers) Greek song titles.

continues.....

The instrumentals included Robert Schultz's tongue in cheek composition 'Greek to Greek' which elicits some quizzical looks from audience members not familiar with Robert's sense of humour.

Beginner's sessions

A number of aspirant mandolin players, including some experienced musicians who have recently taken up mandolin, are being guided by teachers Ian Bull and Geoffrey Nelson at our beginner workshops. We expect some new graduates to be playing in the main orchestra soon.

Upcoming performances

The CMO expects to continue with a busy schedule in the second half of 2015. This includes a concert as part of Science Week with new compositions by Michael Sollis, some community fund raising performances and another performance at a Canberra embassy.

FAME 2015

Nine CMO members will be travelling to the FAME Festival in July. We look forward to seeing you there.

New committee

In April we held our AGM during which the new committee and office holders were elected as follows: President John Hyam; vice-president Sam Leone; secretary Ian Bull; treasurer Gary Floyd; committee members Karen Dahl, Geoffrey Nelson and Wal Jurkiewicz.

John Hyam

President, CMO

Mandolins in Brisbane

It has been another busy period for Mandolins in Brisbane. Our annual performance as part of the Italian Week in Brisbane was a great success with one of the biggest and most generous audiences. The program consisted of some of our favorite Italian pieces including 'Una Sera a Napoli', 'San Guisto', 'Tarrantella' along with a couple of new favorites, 'Intermezzo Capriccioso' and 'Poesia Alpestre'.

After conducting three of the works with Brisbane Mandolins, embarrassing myself trying to correctly pronounce song titles in Italian, we transformed into our subgroup Queensland Mandolin Ensemble. At this time I traded the baton for a mandolin (don't tell anyone) and played the rest of the performance as a 1st mandolin.

The audience enjoyed the performance tremendously laughing at all my jokes and much like the true style of Italian opera, applauding halfway through a piece. The final applause was quite overwhelming supported by cheers of "more" and "encore". After the show, many audience members took the time to express their enjoyment for the performance and overall experience.

Our next program will consist of new compositions and arrangements for mandolin ensemble from artists like Dvorak, Michael Jackson, Angulo and premier performance of 'Windfall' by Callum Kennedy.

Joel Woods

Conductor, MIB

WAMO



As this Newsletter goes to print, WAMO is working towards their next 'theme night' which has an Irish bent. Out comes the old Planxty O'Carolan suite, and a selection of Irish tunes from Tober-Vogt's Ceilidh. But there are two new works up for their first performance also. An Irish Breakfast (by Schulz) and O'Carolan's Receipt (arranged by Rob Kay) to complete our 20 minute 'Floor Show'.

So it will be a very green, very Guinness and probably a very potato stew affair!! It will be interesting to see what prizes each section of the Orchestra come up with for the late night raffle. Hall decorations I suspect will be full of clover leaves and garden gnomes.

On Wednesday 28th June WAMO held a joint rehearsal together with members from WAYMO. The chosen piece was 'Kleine Suite in G' by Wolki, an ideal piece to help the musical transition from the younger ensemble into WAMO. All three movements were accessible and securely played. WAMO players were handicapped by not getting the music till the week of the rehearsal. Fair's fair!! WAMO will welcome the first of the WAYMO players (Rafael Leoni on guitar) into the main orchestra in a few weeks.

Over the next week or so WAMO will be slightly diminished owing to the running of the FAME Festival in Sydney. However those remaining will note bash the set works for our end of year concert in November. Our best wishes to the FAME committee for a happy and fruitful Festival.

With our big 40th year looming in 2016, the WAMO committee is already in preparation mode. Our 'History of WAMO' book launch will take place in March. Under the direction of Geoff Barber, much work has been done to research and compile as broad a history as possible. Our very well maintained photo archive albums have come into their own, so thanks to Zan Mazanec for many years of work in gathering, labelling and storing the images. Geoff has recently published his own family history and therefore is able to bring this experience to WAMO's own undertaking with good results. A concert program consisting of 5 pieces from our very first concert performance in 1976 will be presented at the Victoria Hall in Fremantle, just meters away from where it all began. Unsurprising the music scores were in the main Overture type scores from early masters such as Macciochi, Kok and Frendo. This will be a dinner, concert and after concert party affair, with as many ex-WAMO players present as we can muster.

The Big Concert will take place in August and I am pleased to have been asked to write a new work for this occasion. I hope too to perform my 'Rivendell' as this tells the journey of the mandolin coming as it did to Fremantle by way of Holland. This was last performed at the 1997 Perth International Mandolin Festival in the large Winthrop Hall at the University of WA.

WAMO hopes to conclude the year with an away in the country concert, something we usually do in March. There are many picturesque towns in the south west, all vying to have us perform for them!!

Robert Schulz
Music Director

Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra

UPCOMING CONCERTS

"PlettroMano"

Mandolin and Guitar Duo Marissa Carroll and Joel Woods

featuring **Concertino in D for mandolin and mandolin orchestra** by Albrechtsberger and
Tangata de Agosto for guitar and mandolin orchestra by Maximo Diego Pujol

Saturday 25th July 2015 at 7:30pm

St Bartholomew's Anglican Church 290 Burnley St, Burnley

This concert by Marissa Carroll on classical mandolin and Joel Woods on classical guitar. Both musicians are based in Brisbane and have performed all over Australia to critical acclaim. In a word, they are fantastic! Their repertoire is quite wide-ranging and it's not unusual to hear Brazilian bossa nova juxtaposed with Baroque music, all played with superb technique and musicality! They will perform with the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra as well as duets and this concert should not be missed.

Tickets will cost \$25 and will be available at the door. For more information and to reserve tickets please ring Donna on 0422 589 675

Performance with the Casey Women's Choir - 23rd August 2015.

This is a combined concert by the Casey Women's Choir with the MMO.



Our Thanks to Julie Quinn for this photo taken at our performance at the Castlemaine State Arts Festival which is a very big Regional Arts Festival in Victoria.

Our feedback was very positive.

continues...

We are currently recruiting Double Bass Players and Mandolin players. If you know of someone who would like to join us, please contact Werner Ruecker on 0402 570 415 for further information.

A warm welcome to our new player Archie Rumsam who is playing in the Guitar section of MMO.

Best wishes to all who are attending FAME in Sydney which is coming up very soon. I hope you enjoy our conductor Werner and also catching up and meeting players from other Mandolin Orchestras.

Lorraine le Plastrier
President

Sydney Mandolin Orchestra

We've all been a bit busy, over the last few months (or is that years!), with FAME Festival planning – but not too busy to fulfil our concert obligations!

SMO performed for the Ryde Eastwood District Music Club in May, to a fairly good sized audience, considering it was the first really cold night this year! Ian Bull (CMO) was in Sydney on business and was able to be a part of the audience.

The Festival planning is going well and we're looking forward to a great week of music-making and fun. We're looking forward to welcoming many of you to Sydney next Sunday.



COZMO - Capital of Australia Mandolinata

COZMO's schedule for 2015 continues both to be busy and productive. As our first semester draws to a close we look back on a number of our ensemble's activities that have helped to create a greater awareness in our community of the mandolin as a very accessible instrument for all, and the joy of making music together in a mandolin ensemble. We had a great performance at the National Botanic Gardens, we participated in Canberra's "Connect And Participate" Expo to showcase its community clubs, with a stall offering information and 10-minute "taster lessons" and a stage performance, and recently gave our annual Winter Concert.

The Winter Concert was held at our home base, the Hellenic Club in the City, on a bright Canberra winter afternoon last Sunday. The concert opened with a performance by our COZYMO group, playing a set that included Croatian pieces and tunes penned by WAMO's Robert Schulz. COZYMO was then joined by COZMO for their final number, a bright march tune. COZYMO – our Learning Groups (at Beginning and Continuing levels) showed their playing skills after just a few months of learning the mandolin, guitar and bass, to the delight of family and friends amongst the audience. COZMO then presented works by Arcangelo Corelli, Stephen Lalor and Rob Kay, and traditional tango, Italian and Latin tunes – all well received by our enthusiastic audience.

Our biggest change in COZMO in this first half of the year has been having a conductor out front; adjusting to learning and watching out for signals and indications of changes in dynamics and tempi etc. Before saying more about this recent venture, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of COZMO, to sincerely thank our multi-instrumentalist and founding member Col Bernau. Col, as well as being our MD, our librarian, our theory and music techniques teacher and coach, has also been our truly excellent and inspirational conductor-from-the-chair since we began. Thank you, Col!

Our new conductor Derrick Brassington is finding that directing a mandolin ensemble is quite a change from his usual music activities as a professional musician, teacher, and leader of several big bands in Canberra, but he says he's loving it – and we are really enjoying working under his baton! Derrick's direction is certainly adding a different dimension to our performances and will no doubt increasingly do so as we all become more accustomed to each other.

The addition of a conductor has also given rise to a new initiative in our rehearsals. We have incorporated a "Technical Skills Session" into the final thirty minutes of our weekly rehearsal time. Finding that addressing technical issues in rehearsal was taking up valuable rehearsal time, we decided to look at these during the last half hour of rehearsal, where players can look at particular parts of pieces together, either in sections or mixed groups to sort out timing of phrases, fingering, fretboard positions or whatever else that needs looking at. So far, it seems to be a very effective way of using our rehearsal time more efficiently.

As we move towards the end of winter and the start of spring, a new season of Floriade (Canberra's famous tulip festival), and other festivals and fetes will be upon us, so the next couple of months will see COZMO working together on new performance pieces.

Lea O'Brien,
Manager, COZMO

Auckland Mandolinata

We are now into our regular season of performances and although we haven't been too busy with performances so far this year, we have been able to use some time to improve technique and concentrate on new pieces. Something we are now trying to do at least once a year is have a full day of intensive sectional practice with the idea of ironing out technical issues and getting tips and tricks for specific parts, which is of great value as anyone who has taken part in a FAME festival will know. Even done once a year we have found these to be a great boost for training as we usually don't have time to drill down on every issue during rehearsals. Along with this we are also having a practice every month for those who like to get some extra playing in or help with technique in a fairly informal setting with Lynne and John Flaming.

We are about to launch into more concerts, with our second of four Winter Series concerts rapidly approaching and one slightly out of our usual routine "*Thursdays at Seven.*" This is a regular concert series hosted by local musicians for a discerning regular audience who are used to different acts of a high calibre, so we are very excited about performing for them. Following this we will get busier leading up to summer so all the hard work and extra practice will be sure to pay off.



Guitarists snapped during sectional rehearsal, note picture of puppies in teacup for inspiration.

WHAT'S NEW FROM SCHULZWERKE?

There awaits a new work for Mandolin Orchestra. ***Lament, Breathless and A Short Journey*** (catalogue number MO 079) a 3 movement piece but with each movement able to stand alone. So three for the price of one really!

A guitar ***Concertino for solo guitar and Orchestra*** (Catalogue number MO 080) written with the idea of a work for solo guitar which should be accessible for the upper advanced player without needing virtuoso skills.

Suite Biezenmortel (Catalogue number MG 039) for mandolin, mandola and guitar. This was written in response to Marco Ludemann in Holland who was looking for a work for this combination of instruments and unable to find many examples. The work was presented for the FAME Festival in Sydney for the small ensemble component.

Contact: rschulz@conceptual.net.au

www.robertschulz.net

Mandolins Victoria Inc.

Greetings all from Mandolins Victoria.

As they say at NASA, we have lift off – Mandolins Victoria Incorporated has been launched.

Concert

On Saturday March 28, in the lovely St Stephens Anglican Church Richmond, an inspiring concert was enjoyed by an audience of over 290 who gathered for our launch.

A large orchestra, featuring the joint forces of Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra, Concordia Mandolin & Guitar Ensemble and Mandolins D'amour were conducted by Werner Ruecker and Basil Hawkins. Together with wonderful soloists Slava and Leonard Grigoryan and Stephen Lalor, the combined orchestras put on a truly uplifting concert.

The orchestral repertoire included :

Concerto in Bb for 2 guitars - *Handel*

Concerto in C for mandolin - *Vivaldi*

Ringing the Strings - *Michelle Nelson*

World Music Suite - *Stephen Lalor*

As well as the concerto items Slava & Leonard also played a fantastic set of duos, and were followed by Stephen wowing the audience with some of his solo mandolin works. All three then joined together to perform an original composition by Stephen for 2 guitars and mandolin called *Bukovina Odyssey*.

The concert concluded with a rousing version of *East West* that included all 3 soloists trading improvised lines. The crowd loved it! The video of *East West* can be viewed on Mandolins Victoria's Facebook page.

Slava, Leonard and Stephen all generously donated their time for this concert. We take this opportunity to thank them again for their time, talent and enthusiasm for the venture.

All in all, this was a great concert for our audience and a great experience for all the musicians involved. The members of MMO, CMGE & MDA all showed great enthusiasm and support for this event by attending each others rehearsals. For some, this concert was the biggest musical experience they have had so far. We certainly plan to provide this experience again!

Website

A new business-standard website is currently under construction and due to be launched in August. This is being developed to provide an informative and interesting site that will create a strong online presence for Mandolins Victoria, and a central focus for promoting mandolin music and events within Victoria.

Plucky Kids

Equally important for our long-term aims, Mandolins Victoria is holding it's inaugural kids workshop in the coming school holidays. Titled 'Plucky Kids' this one day event is aimed at students aged 9 – 17, for all plucked string instruments including mandolin, guitar, ukulele and banjo to combine in a mixed ensemble. We will be encouraging participants to try at least one of the other instruments throughout the day. The emphasis is on participation, learning and having fun with group music.

The event is on Wednesday July 1, at Clifton Hall, Richmond Uniting Church on Church Street, Richmond. Enquiries may be directed to Joan Harris: 9499 2899, or to Michelle Nelson at Modern Guitar Tuition; 9898 9543. There are details posted on our Facebook page and the event will be advertised via 'Weekend Notes' (Melbourne-based website).

Our inaugural Annual General Meeting will be held on August 16.

If you haven't done so already please "like " our Facebook page to help us keep you posted on events in Victoria.



*Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra “Midday Interviews 2015”**Werner Ruecker**interviewed by Lorraine Le Plastrier*

Lorraine – Werner would you select five pieces of music you love/like across any genre.

Werner - Ancient Airs & Dances Suite no. 2 : Respighi

L - This particular piece of music by Respighi - would you tell us why you chose this piece and do you remember when you first heard it?

W - It was on the way to rehearsal one night with my father. We had started rehearsing a few weeks earlier the Ballet Suite arranged by Siegfried Behrend which is actually the 1st movement of this Suite by Respighi based on the music of Fabrizio Caroso. I just really liked it and thought how much richer it all sounded with a symphony orchestra.

The 2nd movement (Danza Rustica) is such a happy movement you can just imagine people frolicking through villages as they go about their business.

Then comes the 3rd movement : Campanae Parisiennes (Aria) It was and still is in my opinion one of the most beautiful melodies I’ve ever heard. I still get very emotional when I hear it today. I remember Dad telling me about Respighi and how people thought he was a plagiarist composer incapable of writing his own music. Totally not true!!!! But he also pointed out to me what a fantastic orchestrator Respighi was. If you listen to the texture of this orchestration it is just brilliant.

The whole Suite is finished with a triumphant finale : Bergamasca again brilliantly orchestrated.

So whenever I hear this piece I remember that night in the car and the wonderful memories I have of my father.

L - **The photo of yourself as a young boy. What is the story of this photo?**

W - It was my 1st Communion shortly before we migrated to Australia. I was, I think a little young (5 years old) but Mum & Dad wanted me to have my 1st Communion before we left. I really had no idea what it was all about...but what I do remember is getting lots of presents and that was really cool.

L - **Do you remember what your ambition was when this photo was taken?**

W - I think I wanted to be a gutter sweeper. I used to sweep the gutters outside our block of flats with a big heavy industrial type broom that was about twice as big as me. I have no idea why I used to do this...just that I thought it was fun. Mum thought she’d buy me a little toy broom as I was struggling with the weight of the big one but I refused to use it. Even in those younger days I had a stubborn streak.

L - **Your second choice is Fifth Symphony by Beethoven and you have listed him as one of your favourite composers. Another of your choices is Beethoven’s Piano Concerto no. 4 in G major, Opus 58 This piece was composed in 1805-1806. It is a long composition by Beethoven the opening bars seem to trigger a moving response very quickly. Tell us please why you chose this piece?**

W - Beethoven was always a favourite composer of mine. I think the thing I love about this piece is the opening. It starts with the piano not the orchestra. This is a little unusual for a concerto. In my mind Beethoven isn’t given enough credit for his, at times, innovative approach. This concerto isn’t one where you marvel at the technical wizardry of the soloist (although I’m sure it is difficult) rather you can’t help but get caught up in the interplay between piano and orchestra. After a while I always forget I’m actually listening to a concerto and the themes are moving from one to the other.

Continued...

L - You are the Conductor of the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra Werner. Do you have a favourite Conductor and why?

W - Zubin Mehta & Seiji Ozawa. They just bring so much energy to the music and always seem so involved and in control. Ben Northey (Associate Conductor of the MSO) also rates a mention. Lovely guy, very gifted musician and great technique.

L - I listened to Respighi Suite 2 on Youtube and it was the Boston Symphony conducted by Seiji Ozawa!

L - As a conductor how do you like to work to achieve the collaboration necessary between players or soloists or both?

W - I think it depends on the group. A good ensemble isn't just made up of good players. It is a group that somehow grows together over time. In an amateur or community group such as the MMO the one thing that that type of ensemble generally does better than a professional group is create a sense of energy and enthusiasm for what they do. If you can harness that energy and all the other factors are in place such as plenty of rehearsal and practice, music not too hard etc, you'll have the makings of a good ensemble.

The difficulty is trying to get everyone on the same page. Over a period of time I think as conductor players become used to your style and are able to have a better understanding of what you want. It ultimately comes down to your communication skills both with the stick/baton/hands and also how you rehearse the group.

L - How do you hear the complexity of sounds when conducting?

W - I guess this comes down to how well you as conductor know the individual parts. If you've done your homework/practice then it really isn't a problem hearing what's going on. Some pieces are very simply structured and easy to hear. Others though are far more complex. Eduardo Angulo for instance in most of his music has so much going on that it takes a long time to develop the ability to hear all the parts.

As a teacher I've often said that the hardest thing to get students to do is to listen to their playing. You can listen without hearing. I know that sounds silly but it's true. I find myself often when I'm playing getting to the end of a section or piece and saying "wow I've got no idea how that sounded because I just wasn't listening"

It's easier in some respects as a conductor to hear everything because you're not distracted by having to have your fingers in the right place, right note etc. The baton pretty much just goes by itself so you have plenty of time to keep the ears open and take it all in.

In an ensemble as a player though you hear what's going on around you and very little else which makes it hard to stay together and do all the things you need to do. It's one of the reasons why I'm so adamant about dynamics. If you practice and play/follow the dynamics in the music you are more likely to be listening in greater detail to what you're doing, the sound you're making and even hearing other sections. The trick is to find that balance between staying focused on your part/playing and not be distracted by others.

L - Fantasia for 4 hands Piano: Schubert. Why this particular piece of music Werner?

W... I have always loved the lyrical melodic lines of Franz Schubert. I was teaching guitar at Melbourne Grammar in the early 80's when one day I was walking past the hall they had upstairs and heard this wonderful piece being played on the piano by the then Director of Music and her Secretary. It is typical Schubert. I've always found that with Schubert you just can't help but feel like you're singing along. She kindly lent me the vinyl album and I recorded it on to cassette which I used to play over and over again until I eventually wore it out. I had forgotten about it for many years until I was putting together a DVD for our family's celebration of 50 years in Australia in 2013. Hermann Mangold had very graciously recorded the narration of the diary my father kept on the trip by ship over to Australia in 1963. The opening sentences are : "22nd June 1963. The last day at home. The atmosphere has reached zero. That is natural of course. Saying goodbye is hard for all of us."

When you read or hear those lines combined with the opening of the Fantasia I couldn't have found a more appropriate piece of music to open with.

Continued...

L - Would you comment on how you work to achieve individual playing to come together to play as an orchestra?

W - Individual playing: As a conductor it's all about your interpretation of the music. Within the process of learning and rehearsing pieces there are many hurdles and obstacles to overcome to achieve unity. A group like the MMO creates additional challenges as there is a varying standard of player ability yet everyone is playing the same notes at the same speed with the same dynamics etc etc. You have to be clear with your directions and instructions, which I hope I am most of the time. Most of all though you have to be determined to get whatever it is you want. You also have to be willing to compromise and understand that people are always trying to do what you ask. If you can do all of that with a sense of humour and encouragement then the players will follow. I know I don't always achieve that but I do try. I can assure you there have been many drives home from rehearsal where I have chided and admonished myself for being overly grumpy. As a player in an orchestra people have to understand that there is no individual in the group. It's all about the ensemble and it's all about following and trying to do what's being asked of you. Hopefully most players understand this. My experience over the years with various groups has been that those who don't put the ensemble first when playing in an orchestra tend not to last too long. At the end of the day people join orchestras to make music with fellow players so why wouldn't you do your best to achieve a united sound?

L - Benedictus (from The Armed Man): Karl Jenkins. Your choice of this piece?

W - If you listen to this piece it's such a simply constructed piece of music. Very gently it lures you in and almost puts you to sleep. And then this almighty fortissimo. It really is the Surprise Symphony of modern times. Every time I listen to it I get goose-bumps. Curiously whilst the Schubert was the 1st piece on the soundtrack for the Family 50 year celebration DVD this Benedictus was the last.

L - Do you remember what music you heard first when you were little?

W - First music I heard? It would have to be something on guitar. We didn't get a television until I was 5 so we had a lot of family time not just with my sisters and parents but the extended family as well. Dad's guitar would inevitably come out at these gatherings. There's a lot to be said for family life back in those days. Certainly for us music played a very important part in it. We used to write our own songs as a family. Whenever we felt down in those early years in Australia it was always Dad's guitar that came to the rescue.

L - What type of instrument do you play? Is it a particular brand?

W - Until recently I was playing Dad's Jose Ramirez which he bought in 1976. It's still a beautiful instrument and still has a lovely tone but it just doesn't compete with the modern classical guitar of today. The action is fairly high and I'm afraid my older fingers just don't have the same strength as they used to. Recently I've managed to get hold of an Australian guitar made by Sydney Luthier Trevor Gore. It has a lovely tone and is really loud. Such a different instrument to the Ramirez.

L - It's a Long Way to the Top: AC DC. This choice of music - do you recall when you first heard it and what you were doing?

W - Long Way to the Top AC DC : This was a huge hit when I was in my teens and probably one of the few pieces of rock and roll music that I really liked. Even in those days I was a bit of a nerd and only really listened to classical music. Although I have to admit that my 1st album was Cat Steven's Teaser and the Fire-cat. I can remember agonising for hours with a friend at Brash's Southland over whether to buy it or not. Proudly brought it home and put in on the record player and said to Dad to come and have a listen. I played Moonshadow for him, which has a lovely guitar intro. At the end he just looked at me and said "what did you buy that rubbish for?" Totally devastated!!!! I forgave him....eventually.

Continued...

L - What are two of your favourite Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra favourites?

W - Andalusian Romance : Sor/Schneider and Feierlicher Reigen: Ambrosius (Chaconne in D major)

L - Ambrosius was considered German Avante – Garde composer. It is interesting that he chose a dance of the 16th century. Why does this piece interest you Werner?

W - Firstly I'd hate to think what the mandolin orchestra landscape would look like without the influences of the Ambrosius and Wölkis of this world. Ambrosius in particular was an established composer before writing for mandolin orchestras. All his music is so well orchestrated and generally engages all sections of the orchestra. The Chaconne in particular is a great example of contrapuntal orchestration.

I recently saw the YouTube clip of it being performed at the FAME Festival in Perth with Marco Ludemann conducting. It was very different with timps etc but that's what great compositions allow you to do. It gives you the ability to add new things without detracting from the essence of the piece itself.

L - Werner would you list two favourite Australian composers and a favourite piece of their music.

W - Nigel Westlake: Compassion

L - Nigel Westlake is a favourite of mine too Werner... – What is it about this composer's music or this piece that you respond to?

W - Nigel Westlake is just a brilliant orchestrator. I put him up there with the likes of Ravel and Debussy. It is impossible to listen to his music without forming a mental image of something relevant to the music. His use of instruments, sometimes very sparingly, is so clever.

L - Your next composer is Phillip Houghton and your choice for his composition: Gothica Suite

W - I met Phillip Houghton about 10 years ago. He is quite an eccentric character. His music for guitar is always engaging as a player even his very simple studies for students. He can be over descriptive as to how he'd like something played but seems to leave just enough up to the individual. His use of the instrument always seems to fit so beautifully with the music that is written and you always get the images that he is trying to paint.

L - Last Question Werner...When conducting or playing how do you convey and enthuse people about the feelings of music?

W - I was brought up to understand that music is always about feelings, expression, phrasing, images and the music itself. It was/is never about playing notes. Too many young people are coming out of University or College and are very good technicians but poor musicians. I think as a teacher and conductor it's about trying to get people to identify in some way with what they are hearing /playing. Dynamics, rhythm and timbre play a huge part in that for the individual or an ensemble. If I approach a piece with no energy as a conductor or pay no attention to dynamics etc. then that's generally what I'll get back. But if you can convey a level of enthusiasm to the musicians in front of you that you have for the music then you will get players involved. Once people are emotionally attached to a piece of music they seldom play unmusically.

L - Thank you Werner for being the first of these interviews is there anything else you would like to add?

W - Thank you Lorraine for asking some tricky questions. I've really enjoyed the process and hope that my responses give people some insight into who I am.



FOR SALE: Private collection of 16 mandolins

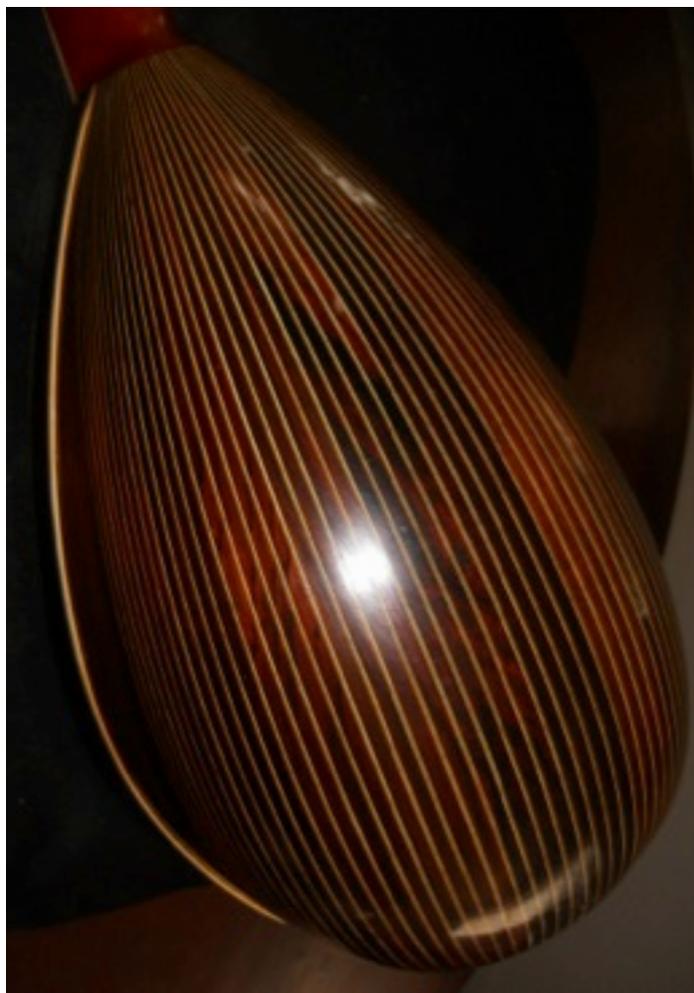
Made between 1917 and 2002, two are in need of some repairs, the others are all in very good playable condition.

There are two round back mandolins, the rest are flat back models.

The mandolins are located in NSW, and Alexandra is trying to arrange to bring them in to Macquarie Uni during the week of the FAME festival.

For more details, photos & prices please contact Alexandra Shiga.

agshiga@gmail.com



Which Finger?

But Does It **SOUND** Good?

INSTALMENT 16

Before you spend the kids' inheritance on a Lloyd Loar, remember the three main factors in making a good sound. In this order:

- 1. The player.***
- 2. The plectrum.***
- 3. (a long way later) The instrument.***

Defining some terms: Tuning and Intonation

Tuning is part of how an instrument is “set up” to be played, and doesn’t even need to be done by the player. On a string instrument, it usually mainly means adjusting the tension of the strings to a certain ideal pitch.

Intonation then is to do with how well the player interacts with the instrument to make notes of the appropriate pitch.

It’s not really very controversial to say that making suitable sounds is a basic aspect of playing a musical instrument. How and even the extent to which the player can influence this aspect though vary widely between instruments. For example, on a harpsichord or a pipe organ, the only way the player can change the sound, is by changing the registration – pulling and pushing various knobs - and that can be done by another person too, who doesn’t even need to be a musician. There is even disagreement about what a pianist can do about the matter, although, as the full name *pianoforte* suggests, controlling levels of volume is one uncontroversial parameter. There’s certainly not much the player can do to influence the pitch (highness or lowness) of a given note on any of these instruments. So with these instruments, tuning is an issue but intonation usually isn’t.

By contrast, a trumpet or a violin can produce an enormous variety of sound, in terms of volume, timbre (“tone colour”) and pitch, among other things, depending on the skill and awareness of the player.

On the mandolin of course, it’s mainly the plectrum that imparts energy to the strings, making them vibrate in various ways, and producing sound, which can be put to musical use. And it’s the player who wields the plectrum, and can regulate volume by regulating the amount of energy imparted to the string – hitting it harder or softer. Perhaps oddly, considering the hours, days, months and years serious players of most other instruments spend working on the area of sound, it’s pretty sadly neglected by many mandolin players. Enough of that though - this series is mainly about the *stopping* hand.¹

¹ The left hand, if you are right-handed. If you are left-handed though, like for example President Obama, Paul McCartney, Leonardo da Vinci or Anna Magdalena Bach, don’t be intimidated by bullying, insensitive and ill-informed right-handed teachers who tell you it doesn’t matter which way round you hold the instrument. It does!

Continued...

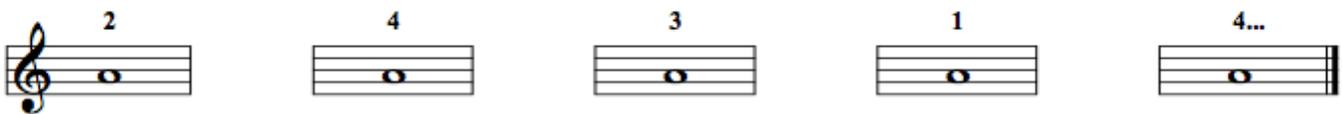
Flawed stopping technique leads to a number of undesirable results on the mandolin². Buzzing and uncleanness are frequent among the unwary. People who practise a lot often manage to keep these more obvious evils down to a minimum. Even these, though, often play with faulty *intonation*, even though the instrument may be perfectly *tuned*. For various reasons, they apply more tension than is appropriate to the string, making the note produced somewhat higher than it should be.

- Cause 1 (the most common): usually without even noticing it – some people pull the string a little out of the straight line it should make between bridge and nut – *bending* it inadvertently. See “bend/guitar” on your search machine to get explanations of this technique, which is of course perfectly respectable if used at the right time. Please try some of the on-line examples, and search your conscience as to whether you sometimes *bend* the string unintentionally.
- Cause 2 (a lot less common): there are also players (ironically, usually well-trained ones) who do press the string in exactly the right direction, but simply push harder than is necessary, which also subjects the string to too much tension. (TMG-GAME N, Step 2)

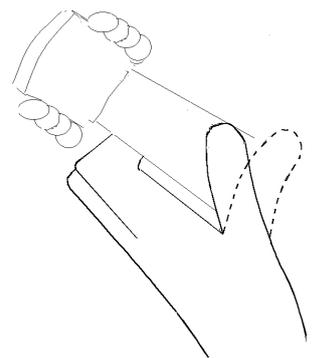
One good way to become aware of both these pitfalls is to spend as much time with GAME G of TMG as you need to really internalize the principles. If you don’t have access to TMG though, you can make interesting discoveries about yourself by trying the following:

- Stop the note A at the 7th fret on the D string, using in turn each of the left-hand fingers individually - several times and varying the order – and comparing the results. If they are either inconsistent, less than lovely in quality, or sound different in any respect depending on which finger, you’re doing something wrong.

Fig. 1



- Play each note singly, with a few seconds break in between. Let each note ring for as long as you can. Mix up the order of the fingers (like I suggest in Figure 1), and take your hand right away from the instrument between notes. The aim here is not to join notes, but rather to examine how efficient each individual finger is. Make sure the thumb is placed optimally to support the respective stopping finger. Can you ease the thumb pressure and still make a clear and lovely note? Can you even take it off the neck completely, so that the only point of contact between the instrument and your left hand is the tip of the respective finger?



Most often of course, we don’t play merely one single note. Rather, we want to play several notes successively, which means that at least at the moment we change from one note to another, at least two fingers are pressing.

² For a more detailed discussion of many things that follow, see *The Mandolin Game* (TB 2010), here abbreviated to “TMG”.

Continued...

Many earlier articles in this series have dealt with what the stopping hand can do to have a deliberate effect on the sound of the mandolin. The most obvious theme has been efficiency (mainly ease and fluency really) and intonation – whether the notes are acceptably in tune. I’ve tried to point out that widely-held views on fingering (strategically at least adopted from the violin, which, unlike the mandolin, is a single- string, fretless instrument, held under chin and played with a bow - which a surprisingly large number of people who see similarities with the mandolin don’t seem to have noticed...), just aren’t very good when it comes to getting pitch right – among lots of other weaknesses in the system. And, far from being merely negative or destructive, my criticism has always been balanced by really good alternatives.

My students of course regard this non-standard approach to fingering neither as an “alternative” nor as eccentric and willful craziness, but rather as simply common sense. In fact, when I sometimes invite them to try out a “conventional” fingering, they usually just refuse to do things which they are convinced make about as much sense as hiking through a desert on ice skates. (This even happened with Jenny at a seminar last week.) After all, they don’t do much at all without being convinced there is a good reason, and neither they should!

You might care to try the following experiment. The music is the first measure of the best known of all music involving the Neapolitan mandolin, the serenade from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

Fig. 1(a) Just the notes.

1(b) 3rd position
1 2 3 4 1 3 1 1
The most common fingering.

1(c) 4 0 1 2 4 1 4
The way my students see the world.
(All within the first 5 frets, utterly no hand shifting required)

Comments:

- i. There must be many theoretically possible ways to play the notes in Figure 1(a), but most of them (e.g. using the pinkie for every note), would be so silly you rightly wouldn’t even consider them.
- ii. Almost every well-brought-up mandolin player on the planet would choose the solution in 1(b) – and I certainly used to. Notice the use of the term “3rd position”, (a standard term in the universe of traditional technique): of course, this very term *means* the fingering indicated, so if the printed music has a sign indicating the 3rd position, traditionally trained players would apply the fingering in 1(b) anyway. Having fingering numbers in addition to a position sign is redundant, because for those who think the violin system is a good idea, “position” is a concise way of prescribing which finger to use with which note.
- iii. You might notice that in 1(c) the term “position” doesn’t occur. There are two reasons for this omission: one is that my students don’t think in such categories, so the term is simply not part of their everyday vocabulary, and another is that the overall scheme of fingering suggested in 1(c) can’t be described in conventional position terms anyway, although each individual note/finger relationship could be. So

Continued...

iv. if you fancy the mental exercise, consider how to designate the “position” the first five 16th notes in 1(c): D with the pinkie is in the so-called ½ position, the open E string is in no position at all, both F# and G are in the 1st position, and A again in the ½ position. So in terms of position theory, the solution in 1(c) would indicate irrationally excessive position changing. In the everyday sense of the word though, utterly no change of spatial position of the hand is required by. So violin fingering theory can’t cope with the very sensible allocation of fingers to notes in 1(c). And do you seriously suggest using the hand in a contorted way to fit in with a certain prescriptive sort of analysis? Not with *my* hand, thank you!

Please practice first 1(b) – the conventional solution – slowly and conscientiously, for a few minutes, or as long as you need to start to get a good and reliable result. Then take a few minutes break, to allow the various intellectual and sensory impressions to settle a bit. When you feel refreshed again, do the same thing with 1(c).

Be careful though: it’s certain to feel simply weird for a while, because the fingering scheme is at odds with everything you’ve ever done - unless perhaps you play the classical guitar, lute or violoncello.

And be fair: work at it for as long as you need to get an optimal result, otherwise you can’t legitimately claim an opinion on the matter. (My students don’t refuse to try conventional solutions because these are strange to them, but rather because they quickly spot the dogmatic prescriptiveness of the solutions demanded.)

You might try the measure with both respective fingering strategies for the next week or so, whenever you pick up a mandolin. That way, both systems should hopefully start to feel normal. When you have reached that stage, you can compare the results, both in terms of ease and sound. This examination illustrates that there are usually several possible technical solutions for a given musical situation, depending on the aesthetic result you want to achieve. The easiest solution (physically speaking) usually also produces the best result, but this doesn’t always need to be the case: if you really have to choose between comfort and a desired result, you may just have to practice an uncomfortable solution more if it’s the only way to get the result you want. Unlike the arbitrariness and contradictions of conventional fingering theory, the genuinely rational approach illustrated by 1(c) really does place the issue of sound where it belongs – at the head of the list of priorities.

Keith Harris