

# BULLETIN: ASME VICTORIA

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Australian Society for Music Education,  
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**Promoting continuous, sequential and developmental  
music education experiences – *a major goal of ASME***

## Chairperson's message

### Sue Arney

When the suggestion was made to focus on rural and regional teaching in this *Bulletin* I was thrilled, as I strongly recommend the experience of living and teaching in the country.

As a 21-year-old graduate teacher back in the 1980s I received the offer of a teaching position in South Gippsland, a 90 minute drive south-east of Melbourne. I had never been to the region but I packed up my Carlton apartment and moved to Leongatha to share a house with two other graduates from my BEd (Sec Mus) in preparation for establishing a cooperative music program across four secondary schools. It was the best thing I have ever done!

My message to anyone who has ever thought about moving to the country to teach is just do it! We were embraced by the communities of the small towns (the largest of which was only 3,500) and instantly invited to regular dinners at colleagues' houses, 'Happy Hour' every Friday afternoon at school and social activities at the local footy club.

This instant sense of community and belonging is something rarely experienced living in metropolitan Melbourne.

As musicians and music teachers we were never short of



playing opportunities. The community theatre groups 'pounced' on us for their musicals where we played and compèred. We performed in and conducted community concert and brass bands and my two colleagues (trumpet and sax/clarinet) started a jazz band with the Assistant Principal of one high school on piano and vocals, the Principal of one of the primary schools on drums and a rather renowned maths teacher on washboard (and he was amazing!). They played regularly at functions around the district and we recently found a photo of us playing together at a Year 12 formal at the request of the students!

As we built music programs in the four secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, our ensembles had a full and fabulous performance calendar throughout the community as well.

Most importantly, during that time we formed some of our strongest and longest-lasting friendships and to this day have some of the funniest and most heart-warming stories to share. We could clearly see our impact not only in the schools in which we worked but also on the wider community.

As we come to the end of this extraordinary year I wish to extend my thanks to the ASME (Vic) Council for its enthusiasm, wisdom, vibrant discussion and collegiality – we are fortunate to have such an exceptional collection of people.

To each of our members I send my warmest wishes for a safe, relaxing and joyful festive season and summer. We all truly deserve it this year!

## Editorial

### Ros McMillan

This issue of the *Bulletin* has a focus on music and music education in regional and rural areas. An interesting outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be an appreciation of the value of country living – the consequence of forced lockdowns that caused a vast number of people to leave their city offices to work from home, and successfully too.

A 'Letter from the Country' (see page 3), written by Ben Lester, exemplifies this. Ben, a recipient of the ASME (Vic) Graduate Teacher Award given at the end of his teacher training, has been the music teacher in a Victorian country town for four



years. His experiences show how well he has been welcomed and how the town has benefitted from his arrival.

Further in the *Bulletin*, the research article by Robert Manley documents his investigation into classical music performance in country towns. He describes how communities not only can retain their support for chamber music but become more appreciative of this form of music through a surprising means.

Earlier this year ASME (Vic) completed its second year running Music Australia's *Music: Count Us In* program. The program was enormously popular to the extent that music teachers in States other than Victoria registered for the nine workshops that were held online and presented by Chapter Council member Susie Davies-Splitter. Reports from six participants can be found in this *Bulletin* as well as a call for expressions of interest in the 2021 program.

### Cover

Workshop presenter Rob Manley with students from Moree Primary School, NSW. Photo courtesy Thomas Williams.

# A letter from regional Victoria

**Ben Hester is a former recipient of the ASME Graduate Teachers' Award who completed a Master of Teaching at The University of Melbourne in 2018. He has been teaching in regional Victoria for four years.**

This December marks four years since I made the move from the big (and beautiful) city of Melbourne back to my hometown, Colac, in regional Victoria.

Having just completed my teacher training at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education and being fortunate to have obtained a full-time teaching position at my very own secondary school, Trinity College Colac, I packed my belongings and returned to the place of my youth. Unlike the usual visits to Colac to see family and friends during the eight years I was living in the city, this time I was moving back for the foreseeable future in a professional capacity and with the opportunity to contribute to the education system and community that I was so fortunate to experience growing up. It was a welcome not-so sea-change!

Fast forward to the present day and I am on the final stretch of the teaching year (a year like no other!) for the fourth time. During the years I have been lucky enough to enjoy all the experiences that come with being a teacher in a small but thriving regional town.

Not only do I get to feel like a minor celebrity every time I visit the grocery store (thanks to the inevitable abundance of students sighting you out in the wild in between aisles or

even serving you at the checkout), but I also get to experience such things as performing alongside students in local theatre productions and being on the same musical line-up as present and past students in local community events. I also play with and against students and/or their parents in the local cricket competition and even get heckled (in the nicest possible way) by students on the sidelines watching my lustrous reserves football career unfold.

All these things, although not directly related to my day job, have contributed immensely to my enjoyment of living and teaching regionally and I can honestly say that some of these experiences have been a highlight of my time here.

Mix these community-based events with experiences at school, such as organising and participating in many music concerts and productions and developing and implementing a diverse and rich music curriculum, and you get a fulfilling and enjoyable teaching experience. I have also enjoyed producing students' recordings and writing compositions/jingles with them ('Restart Your Device' was a hit within the school and even had the honour of being played, perhaps too many times, as the moving music between classes!). I have also had spontaneous jam sessions with students during breaks just for fun.

I have always been an advocate of making the most of opportunities and teaching in a regional town is something that every teacher should consider, should that opportunity arise. The air is fresh out here, space is plentiful and the commute is short. Perhaps best of all, the community is welcoming.





## My Research

# Audience engagement for classical music in a regional Australian community: the role of improvisation

**The research report in this issue is written by Robert Manley, who is completing a PhD at the University of Queensland.**

My PhD project (currently under examination) looked at the musical and sociocultural factors that influence audience engagement with classical chamber music in a regional Australian town.

My investigation responded to widely discussed concerns in the literature regarding sustainability challenges for classical music in contemporary society. Evidence for such concerns included various recognisable trends: declining audiences, an ageing audience demographic and changing habits of music consumption. A related issue motivating this study was a growing concern with the sustainability of career pathways in the Australian Arts sector. Career difficulties experienced by arts practitioners were significantly magnified in regional areas (Australian Council for the Arts, 2017).

Using social capital as a guiding theoretical framework, my case study investigated community engagement and musical engagement strategies for classical chamber music. A key aspect was to consider the music identities of regional chamber musicians and their shaping factors. Multiple stakeholder perspectives concerning classical music engagement were collected. These perspectives included interviews with regional music practitioners, autoethnographic accounts of touring performers and surveys with both audiences and public stakeholders.

One strand of the case study was designed as a performance pilot project, including a cross-genre collaboration with my classical duo and a regional singer-songwriter. The reflexive performance experiences of the duo members were informed by attending classical improvisation workshops with Dr David Dolan at the Australian National Academy of Music. These experiences inspired the inclusion of “disciplined” approaches to improvisation (Sawyer, 2004) as a strategy for collaboration and engagement in the pilot project.

From the perspectives of performers, improvisation represented a central point of connection facilitating the cross-genre collaboration. Improvisation provided a flexible toolbox to tackle musical challenges in collaborative rehearsals, including the divergent score-reading abilities of performers. By improvising in relation to a guiding framework of musical structure discussed and developed in rehearsals, the singer-songwriter

assumed an interactive role in the duo’s programmed classical works and vice versa.

Improvisation enhanced the audience experience for classical chamber music in the trialled performances, stimulating perceptions of interactivity and emotional engagement with the music. Such findings extended links established between musical improvisation and audience engagement, including those determined by a recent multi-disciplinary study of chamber music performance (Dolan et al., 2018). In my study, perceived connections between improvisation and emotional engagement included both audience observations of musical interaction and suggestions that improvisation enhanced the substantive presentation of repertoire.

In addition to enlivening the concert experience, descriptive statistics indicated that improvisation increased the inclination of audience members to re-attend a classical performance. This inclination complemented audience perceptions of reduced formality and increased immersion in performance that were associated with the combination of improvisation and classical music. Critical and ‘general’ audience respondents were distinguished by their previous levels of activity as creative practitioners. Interestingly, the ‘less qualified’ audience members were more convinced that improvisation increased their own perceptions of immersion. This implies that improvisation could play a role in drawing new audiences to classical concerts.

Improvisation reportedly provided a channel for listeners to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar repertoire, the latter category including contemporary and twentieth-century Australian compositions. In tandem with improvisation, audience feedback suggested that the use of multiple instruments (swapping during performance) was an unexpected feature of performance that enhanced engagement with repertoire presented. Unsurprisingly, concepts of novelty and spontaneity were broadly associated with improvisation in classical performance by audience members in open-ended survey responses.

## References

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# Music: Count Us In – a 2020 success story

**For the second year running ASME (Vic) presented Music Australia's program *Music: Count Us In*. This year, despite – or perhaps due to – the pandemic the response from teachers was overwhelming. Six participants reflect on their experiences.**



## Sue Arney – ASME Organiser

*Music: Count Us In* is truly the song that stops a nation!

ASME Victoria values being able to support Music Australia and teachers across the state in preparing their students for the 'big day' through the delivery of teacher professional learning. We know that teachers welcome an opportunity to engage in collegial conversations with others about how they teach particular aspects of the song and stage it on the day.

In order for this to happen we set up a season of nine workshops across the state in which a local music teacher was invited to 'host' each session in their geographic area.

Susie Davies-Splitter was engaged to design and present the workshops via Zoom, with 30 minutes dedicated to questions and conversations in every session. In these, teachers shared a vast array of resources and suggestions for teaching materials that started with *Music: Count Us In* and included ICT, ideas for various year levels, staging concerts and more.

Community building and collegial connections were fabulous outcomes of the workshops, and whilst we had planned to deliver to Victorian teachers in the first instance, the platform of Zoom meant that 368 teachers from across Australia (and even New Zealand) were able to participate.

## Susie Davies-Splitter – Presenter

It was a great honour to represent ASME in providing the Professional Development for the *MCUI* program to Victorian educators, which later became Australia wide.

After preparing the materials, which included a 45-minute video and various video tutorials (marimba, metallophone, ukulele, boomwhackers and keyboard), I was able to relax, help the hosts greet the participants and open up the session to discussion after the presentation for another 30 minutes.

There were nine sessions in total and it was a pleasure to engage with the educators in very fruitful discussions, particularly around how the song could be taught and used on Celebration Day. This was a particularly difficult year for all teachers with lockdowns and remote learning, as well as additional rules for music teachers that followed the return to school. These included the need to sterilise instruments and cope with 'no singing or wind/brass playing' government policies. However, we were able to settle on some very creative solutions such as focussing on the Auslan signs, music technology and the use of movement and body percussion.

## Lana Ford – Host

It was my pleasure to host this year's *Music: Count Us In* PD event for music educators from Ballarat, Queenscliff, Lismore, Point Cook and Hampton primary and secondary schools. This was not a new experience for me, however, conducting the event over Zoom certainly was.

Hearing that the ASME had invited Susie-Davies-Splitter to present this year's online PD session, I was most excited to be involved and to bring back engaging resources for my students. With everyone's enthusiasm and genuine care to provide the best music experiences for our students during present COVID challenges, the Ballarat and North Victorian region workshop was undoubtedly a most informative, thought-provoking and enjoyable one.

At the time of this workshop some schools were returning to face-to-face teaching, while others continued to plan how to run the event online. Therefore, there needed to be a meaningful collaborative discussion on how to meet such challenges as the uncertainty of location, social distancing and engaging substitutions of sound sources for instruments. There were also suggestions raised by the group, such as singing outdoors and students accessing technology, where possible, to record their performances from home.

The workshop began with a delightful series of introductions before handing over to our presenter Susie, no newcomer to such presentations.

Susie led participants through 45 minutes of video workshopping to demonstrate vocal and instrumental options for teaching the song 'You Won't Bring Us Down'. Participants were encouraged to bring sound sources such as kitchen utensils and other instruments from home. These were used in an interactive session involving playing, chanting and moving in place to explore the musical elements of the song and ways



to teach and perform it. The program resources for the 2020 *Music: Count Us In* were indeed not short of supply with Auslan translation resources, Braille tools, animation, teaching videos and more, easily accessible online for all to take part in this wonderful, music-advocating event.

## Mary Thorpe – Host

About ten years ago, Sue Arney ran a *Music: Count Us In* workshop in Bendigo and this is when my interest began. This year, when Sue asked me to host a workshop in our region, I jumped at the chance to spruik the merits of the program.

With COVID upending just about everything this year, I knew that *MCUI* would be there to bring us together. The *MCUI* website resources are thorough including multi-instrumental arrangements, brilliant First Nations' resources and this year's wonderful addition – the Auslan interpretation.

Unpacking the resources can be tricky, however, Susie Davis-Splitter's guidance was invaluable. Susie introduced the project and website, giving participants a hands-on starting point, literally, with body percussion! Her excellent resources included charts especially suited to the Primary classroom. I was also very grateful to be given an expert 'refresher' in Orff pedagogy.

## Peter Philips – Teacher

I found the workshop inspirational. It encouraged me to take on the *Music: Count Us In* project allowing my school to come together to reunite and celebrate after many months of remote isolated learning at home. The concept of many schools across Australia celebrating one song based on the themes of staying strong, not being put down, raising student voice, overcoming hardship and disaster, promoting resilience, etc, fitted well with our well-being and welfare needs at the time. I used the notes from the workshop to help convince our school staff to take on the project.

I was most impressed with the structure of the workshop which provided excellent teaching resources and well-structured lessons that provided the children with sequentially developed music skills. Teaching the song by breaking it into its parts allowed the students to learn it thoroughly.

I appreciated the opportunity in the workshop to try out the activities and how these were designed to suit all primary school ages and children with special needs.

Our school was fully involved in learning the song and despite COVID-19 restrictions we were able to participate enthusiastically in Celebration Day.

## Anne O'Keefe – Teacher

This was the first time that I had taken part in the *Music: Count Us In* program and I loved it. It has been a hard year with the lockdowns that forced us into remote learning but many good things happened despite this, including the online *MCUI* program.

This was fun and my students loved learning the song and rehearsing it with the instrumental parts. We had never done anything with Auslan before and this was a wonderful aspect of the program. Now I often see my students practising Auslan in the playground and realise what a really important part of their general learning this has been.

I am looking forward very much to next year's *Music: Count Us In* program.

## ASME (Vic) Chapter Council

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## Music: Count Us In – plans for 2021

### Rachel Whealy – National Program Manager

*Music Count Us In* is Australia's largest national school music program and exists to support and empower teachers to deliver high quality classroom music lessons. Teachers are provided with an extensive package of resources designed by leading music education experts and created around a central Program Song. Also offered is the opportunity to participate in face-to-face Professional Development workshops to further develop programming and teaching skills, and to gain Accredited Professional Development (5 hrs) with an online PD option also available. Teachers will have automatic access to all materials via the E-Learning Platform and are encouraged to share information, ideas and Celebration Day plans via the Online Teachers' Forum.

The program culminates in a large-scale national 'Celebration Day' event where schools and school communities come together from all over Australia to advocate and celebrate the importance of music in schools. This event sees hundreds of thousands of students unite (via national broadcast) as one powerful and joyous national voice to perform the SAME SONG, on the SAME DAY, at the SAME TIME! In 2021, Celebration Day will take place on Thursday 4 November at 12pm (AEDT) and takes inspiration from the theme 'Connection to Country'.

Whilst the program's key aim is to advocate the value of quality music education in schools, its composition is underpinned by the core values of inclusivity and equal access. We believe every child should have access to quality music education at school, regardless of distance, social and

socio-economic factors. The program includes an Indigenous language translation of the Program Song plus accompanying lesson plans, video pronunciation guides and associated resources designed for the sharing of knowledge and culture; an Auslan translation of the song with accompanying step-by-step 'How to teach it' videos; a Braille score of the song devised by Vision Australia as well as Lesson Plans (10 weeks) and resources devised for students with a wide range of special education needs. *MCUI* teaching resources are compiled by leading music education experts, contain cross-curricular links and are accessible to both specialist and non-specialist music teachers.

**Please note that there are major changes to the funding model in 2021 due to the withdrawal of financial support from the Federal Government after 15 years of support.**

To this end, in order for the program to be run next year it is vital that schools register either this year or by the end of February 2021. This should be done by completing a short request form, after which a member of the *MCUI* team will contact that school to confirm registration and answer questions. Please note that it is necessary for all teachers to register anew for the 2021 program as previous registration will not carry over as it has done in past years.

All details can be found on the 2021 Program Brochure:

<https://musicaustralia.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c1f6cd5eedcfc179f2fbf0c0a&id=c21096db02&e=17a5817f5e>

The program begins with the Songwriter competition (for secondary students). Submissions are due by 19 February 2021.

## ASME 23rd NATIONAL CONFERENCE

29 September – 1 October 2021

Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart, Tasmania

**SUPER EARLYBIRD REGISTRATION NOW OPEN (close 28 February 2021)**

*Super Earlybird Member Registration \$500*

*Super Earlybird Non Member Registration \$625*

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**Submissions to present a workshop or paper close 14 May 2021**

**More details:** <https://aomevents.eventsair.com/australian-society-for-music-education-national-conference-2021-asme/>





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**29 September—1 October 2021**

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