

RICHARD GILL TRIBUTE, PT. I -- Annotated Chronology

AOSA is comprised of members for whom the Schulwerk approach to music pedagogy is a significant feature of their teaching. Richard Gill is a unique and very talented Australian musician—conductor, composer, performer--and throughout all, a superb music educator who was profoundly influenced by the Schulwerk approach. He directly impacted US music educators in 1982 when he was the featured teacher at the AOSA Conference in Portland, and subsequently at teacher courses and workshops in various locations. Plans were in place for him to be featured at this Cincinnati conference, but due to serious ill health, he cannot be with us. However, we want him to know how much he is valued as a master music educator, and are declaring him an Honorary Member of AOSA. Please read the following summary of his professional development and activities. (The quotes, in italics, are taken from his 2012 memoir, [Give Me Excess of It.](#))

Nov. 4, 1941: Born in Clovelly, a beachside suburb of Sydney, New South Wales (NSW), Australia. He was aware of and attracted to music from his earliest years, beginning with enthusiasm for singing.

1946: Began primary school at St. Anthony's, Clovelly, a convent school run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. All students learned to sing the chants and hymns for the entire church year; Richard knows them still.

1950: Entered 3rd year of primary school at Marist Brothers' School, followed by 5 years of secondary school. Singing continued to be his main interest; choir was the motivation for attending school. He loved learning and singing songs of all genres and became known as a soloist throughout area schools.

The meaning and context of the piece were irrelevant. It was the absolute nature of the sound that transported me and, to this day, it is a strong and essential part of my philosophy of music education that subjecting children to second-rate music implies that they do not have the capacity to be affected or moved by good music (p. 44). ...whether in the backyard or in the choir, [singing] had developed in me a memory for pitch and rhythm, and a sense of musical style. That insight is the basis of the barrow I push today (p. 56).

1955: Acquired a modest piano in his third year of secondary school (age 13). Richard took lessons but did not practice technique or precision. He became a very good sight reader, devouring whatever repertoire he could obtain. He could play what he heard on the radio, of whatever genre, and could easily make up tunes and accompany them. Responding to his first concert attendance (the Sydney Symphony Orchestra), he writes: *...one thing about which I was absolutely certain was that music was special. It was different than everything else. It affected me in a way nothing else did, and it still does (p. 62).* At age 16 he completed secondary school, passing requirements for the Leaving Certificate.

1958: Applied for a scholarship to the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music (the "Con"). Offered in conjunction with 4-year training at the Sydney Teachers College, students prepared to become specialist music teachers at secondary school level. Having had very little preparation in the "understanding" of music, Richard had make-up work to do in theory and piano and tried the tests several times without succeeding. He was accepted the next year at Alexander Mackie Teachers College. After only 6 weeks of classes, students were required to practice teach for several weeks in a school, including all subjects. He discovered that learning their names was the best tool for keeping order. (He was only 16--they were 11 and 12.) He still uses that tool in whatever context it is helpful.

1959: Offered a four-year scholarship to the Con, which was what he originally wanted. His goal was to become a concert pianist; however, his first piano teacher set him straight about the reality of that. Also in the class subjects (theory, etc.) he found he was extremely behind, realizing he should have begun actual music study much earlier. As his second performance subject, he took singing. He fortuitously fell into accompanying and found he could follow and support quite well. This led to learning considerable repertoire for voice and various instruments. He also became involved in playing popular music, in jazz, and in Broadway repertoire.

1963: Richard's 4th year of study at the Sydney Teachers' College. All were guaranteed jobs when they finished. For the final practice teaching he was assigned to Marsden High School, Ermington, a new co-ed (a new idea) school. The current music teacher had established a good choir and a small orchestra.

One thing I have learned about education is that...there is no such thing as a good school—there are only good teachers (p.141). My time as a student teacher was the beginning of a realization that I could probably teach and...probably become quite good at it. But...I had yet to understand how children learn and, more importantly, why they want to learn. (p. 142). I just knew that music was innately good, and because of its innate goodness everyone should have access to it as early as possible in their lives (p. 142).

Prior to graduation he requested strongly that he be assigned the job at Marsden High School. He indeed was, and spent the next 7 years there, finding it very gratifying. He oversaw development of a brass band, learning to play and teach the various instruments. Through teaching he gained the concept of teaching sound before its musical symbol, which made total sense once he saw it (there had been no preparation in his training for this). What he finally learned was *that one of my jobs was to lead these children to music through listening, questioning, commenting and discussing,...involving them in a process through which they would be able to deduce things about the way music behaves,...the ways in which rhythm, melody and harmony interact and combine to produce a multitude of musical styles, structures, and forms, in combination with instrumental and vocal colours. Whether they ended up liking the work was really irrelevant (p. 168).*

1967: Richard attended an Orff Schulwerk workshop in Sydney. *Hearing this music was another life-changing experience; [the teacher's] inspirational work opened my ears and eyes. It hit me in an incredibly powerful way that there had to be more to these instruments than simply reproducing the music Orff had composed for them. Surely this approach was an invitation to children to compose their own music....Hearing [this] group confirmed what I had suspected. The reason we teach music, according to Orff, is so that children can make their own music. This approach...had to contain elements of improvisation: the pentatonic screams for it (p. 170).*

At about the same time, Gill was deeply involved in his first study of the music of J.S. Bach. *My revelations about Bach and Orff had a major impact on my students....Suddenly, the whole school became alive with burgeoning composers. My general music classes also began to play percussion instruments of the Orff variety, and improvisation became an important part of music making. Now, there was a real reason for teaching music. It was to find within every child the potential creator....My belief was that every child was able to make a creative or original contribution of some sort and add to the overall musical experience of a lesson (179-80).*

Marsden became a serious music school, a demonstration school for Sydney Teachers College. Students could also attend annual music camps, an opportunity to thrive for those especially gifted.

1969: Founded the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra in Sydney. He continued as conductor 1973-74.

1970: Arrived in London, intending to get a degree in music (required for promotion in school teaching). He enrolled at Goldsmiths College, but very soon found that he already knew the material required for graduation. *I withdrew from the course, making the decision that I would abandon all attempts to extend my qualifications, and concentrate on practical music-making. And that was that (p. 217).* He then sought out serious opportunities to make music, such as joining a professional symphony chorus. He attended English National Opera performances regularly, and soon fell into vocal coaching. *All I knew for sure is that I wanted to do something connected with singing, especially opera (p. 224).*

1971-2: Introduced in London to Margaret Murray, who encouraged him to attend the Orff Institute Special Course in Salzburg. He was accepted for fall 1971 and began there in September.

What is Orff-Schulwerk? I soon realized that it was exactly what Orff said it was: an approach that, if you took it at face value, gave children an opportunity to make their own music. At the heart of it lies improvisation, the very thing western art music had lost and had been restored to its rightful place with the advent of jazz. To Orff, rhythm was fundamental to teaching children music. He had the great insight that children have a much better chance to develop as genuine creative musicians when they are provided with opportunities to sing in an improvisatory way, to dance in an improvisatory way and to play percussion instruments in an improvisatory way. Starting off with something as simple as a child's playground chant or a nursery rhyme or folk song, children learned organically how to make sense of rhythm, then of pitch and harmony. To me there was no argument with this....(p. 230).

1972 (June, back in Australia): Became an instructor at the NSW Con, starting with a chorus and expanding to other classes. He also began conducting with the Sydney Youth Orchestra program.

1975: Became a Lecturer in Music at the Con, taking over the highly regarded Conservatorium Singers. He also began the Rothbury Opera program, was hired by the School of Education to teach K-2 demo classes, and was approved for conducting schools concerts for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's work with the Sydney Symphony.

1982: Was a guest instructor at the English Summer Course, Orff Institute, Salzburg (other summers also). In November, he was the featured instructor at the AOSA Conference in Portland. With his family, he then traveled November-January doing workshops, with enthusiastic reception by American teachers.

1983: Invited by Jan Rapley, Gill spent the academic year at California State University Chico, teaching music to future classroom teachers, also music appreciation, music methods, choir, and opera. He also did many workshops, which he found more satisfying and interesting. Among others, one took place at Hamline University in Minnesota.

1984: Invited by friend Jane Frazee, he taught a week-long Special Master Class at Hamline University for invited Schulwerk practitioners. The purpose: to demonstrate that the Schulwerk approach could be related specifically and meaningfully to prime examples of Western classical music. The same year, he taught Level III at the Hamline teacher training course.

Along the way, Gill had attended workshop sessions and visited schools in various US locations. Here is his observation on what he saw as Orff Schulwerk practice:

Having observed some American teachers at work, it was very clear to me that they had turned Orff Schulwerk into an activity that not only fed entirely on itself, but also kept on dividing itself and multiplying itself in its own image....In the US, Schulwerk was not related to any music outside its own Orff-style music. I was also concerned that it dealt so cursorily with improvisation, even though improvisation was at the heart of Orff's philosophy (p. 272).

However, we are still friends:

I have never lost my respect or affection for the United States and the people associated with our time there. It was such a positive experience of working in music education...I cherish the memories and the fact that we were so warmly welcomed wherever we went (p. 276).

1985: Became dean of the newly established West Australian Conservatorium of Music in Perth. *I set about building a school of music that would attract the best students and staff to one of the most remote capital cities in the world (p. 280).* He also conducted orchestras for ballet and other productions.

1990: Moving back to Sydney, Gill became chorus master for Opera Australia.

1992: Became director of the Sydney Symphony education program, and generated development of the Sydney Sinfonia, a *small orchestra in which emerging professionals could work in a relatively safe environment* (p. 323). He also developed change in how educational programs (Musica Viva) were presented, with much more student involvement. Later, this was applied in a similar program for adults called Discovery.

1995-2005: Director of OzOpera, a small opera touring company that played in schools and various other venues.

1996: Became a free-lance conductor, motivated by the merger of Opera Australia with Victoria State Opera.

2001-2007: Chief conductor, Canberra Symphony Orchestra.

2005: Became founding music director of newly established Victorian Opera (Victoria State Opera had ceased operation in 1996 when it merged with Opera Australia). Moved to Melbourne.

2012: Left Victorian Opera, returned to Sydney.

2013: With others, established the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra. Currently is the artistic director and principal conductor.

2014: Appointed music director of the Sydney Chamber Choir.

2017: In February, conducted the inaugural gathering of the Sydney Flash Mob Choir at the City Recital Hall, Angel Place, Sydney (monthly 40-minute singalongs).

Awards

1994: Order of Australia Medal

1995 Honorary doctorate, Edith Cowan University of Western Australia

1999 Bernard Heinze Award for services to music in Australia

2001: Centenary Medal

Australian Music Centre award for “Most distinguished Contribution to the Presentation of Composition by an Individual.”

2005: Don Banks Music Award 2006 by the Australia Council for the Arts

2010: Honorary doctorate, Australian Catholic University

2016: Promoted to Officer level within the Order of Australia

2018 July: MOST Achievement award “in recognition of exceptional contribution to the arts in Australia as a conductor and as a music educator.”

Arts Leadership Award at the annual Creative Partnerships Awards

Arts Leadership Award at the Creative Partnerships awards (held at the Art Gallery of NSW)

Patron, Kawai, Sydney International Piano Masterclass Festival 2019

YouTube Presentations

2011: TEDxSydney—Richard Gill, the Value of Music Education. Gill argues the case for igniting the imagination through music and for making our own music.

2012: Richard Gill: The essential role of music in education. TED Talent Search.

2014: Sydney Writers’ Centre Interviews Richard Gill, author of his memoirs, [Give Me Excess of It.](#)

2016: Richard Gill music education workshop. Demo with grades 1 & 2 at Nakara Primary School in Darwin as part of the National Teacher Mentoring Program, facilitated by the Northern Territory Dept. of Education
The Power of Music with Richard Gill OAM, at Happiness and its Causes (posted 2018)

Misc

2005 Became a lead judge on *OperatunityOZ*, a TV show searching for new Australian operatic voices.

Occasional guest on ABC-TV's popular-music panel show, *Spicks and Specks*.

Have You Any Wool? Three Bags Full. Schott, Music for Children Series. For string 4tet, woodwind 4tet, Orff instruments, speech choir, and vocal solos.

--Mary Shamrock