



Relative and absolute chronology

How two musicians are brightening the bleak landscape of new music. **John Shand** reports

If, as optimists insist, every challenge is an opportunity, then the corollary is surely that when one spies no opportunity and sets about creating one's own, it has to be a challenge. Ask Andrew Batt-Rawden and Alex Pozniak, who gazed at the bleak landscape of opportunities for young composers to have their work performed, and decided to make their own.

The result, Chronology Arts, has created scores (if you'll pardon me) of performance openings in Sydney for aspiring artists engaged in the heady possibilities of new music.

"It's also promoting the composers," says 24-year-old Batt-Rawden, "getting them an audience, and starting their careers in a way that hasn't been happening previously."

Established chamber groups and orchestras shy away from new work, especially by unknown composers. To be fair, these composers may be still gaining complete control over their art, but, just as a play has to be performed to really exist, so a score has to be heard.

The pair buzzes with infectious enthusiasm for Chronology, which was launched in 2007, and aims to present new material that is sufficiently innovative to not only represent contemporary developments, but to point to the future. Another intention is to foster collaborations with art forms such as film and dance, which can lead to further work for composers.

Batt-Rawden grew up in Belrose, learning oboe. "By the time I was 16 I figured out I was much more interested in the creation of music rather than the performance of it," he says. He studied composition at the Conservatorium from 2003 to 2006, emerging with a Bachelor of Music (Honours), and meanwhile developing a taste for playing producer as well as composer. Such is his commitment to being Chronology's managing director that he is completing a Masters in Management at UTS.

Two years older, Pozniak (Chronology's artistic director) was raised on Sydney's northern beaches, studied piano, and completed a combined Arts/Music degree at the University between 2000 and 2004.

"The English that I was majoring in, the art history, philosophy and bits of psychology were all adding to my creative thinking," he says. He then completed an Honours year in composition under the supervision of Matthew Hindson, and subsequently two years of a

music

Masters, emerging with a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Music, First Class Honours, the University Medal and, at the time of writing, was awaiting the result of his Masters in Composition. Meanwhile he teaches composition both at the Conservatorium high school and with Hindson at the University.

The enthusiasm for Chronology is shared by both audiences and artists such as Zubin Kanga, a young pianist who is turning ears both here and in Britain with his dashing virtuosity and poised artistry. A Chronology-presented Kanga recital in July gave a snapshot of the vitality, diversity and surprise of the new-music scene. Like jazz, this music tends to remain beneath the radar of most people, despite being where the genuinely questing art is happening, and while so much predictable, pedestrian sludge fills our concert halls, theatres and cinemas.

Kanga, who has known Pozniak since high school, believes the collaborative relationship between composer and performer is vital, and should be fostered more, pointing to the Conservatorium in this regard. He, too, grew up on the northern beaches, and began piano at age five, but did not fully commit to becoming a professional musician until he was undertaking a combined Arts/Science degree at Sydney.

He is grateful that the interdisciplinary approach in the Music Department (now the Arts Music Unit) embraced composition, performing, musicology and ethnomusicology.

"The fact we studied all these things gave us a broader musical education and a more rigorous intellectual education compared to what you would get at most conservatoires in the world," he says.

Further broadening that education were units of engineering, computer science and mathematics, as well as a philosophy major. Kanga emerged with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Music, and the University Medal.

"It's good to have support for performers who are at the same level as the composers they are advocating," says Kanga of Chronology Arts, which now mounts five concerts a year, and is happy to hear from would-be participants. Just make sure you're thinking more than a year ahead. **SAM**

L to R:
Alex Pozniak, Zubin
Kanga and Andrew
Batt-Rawden.
Photo: Ted Sealey