

DECLASSIFY

Episode 12: Centering Australian Music

Guest: John Davis, AMC CEO

Host and Transcription: Victoria Pham

Date of publication: 14/12/2020

SUMMARY

This week, Declassify welcomes the formidable and forever-passionate CEO of the Australian Music Centre, John Davis. He has been a great advocate and supporter of contemporary Australian Music and his work has been key for establishing and broadening the Australian music scene internationally, such as his representation of Australia as the Vice-President of the International Association of Music Information Centres and for the International Society for Contemporary Music. This week we talk new music, what does the word classical even mean? Has 2020 been a time for reflection and what does community well-being mean in this ecosystem of an industry?

TRANSCRIPT

Victoria Pham (VP): Hello everyone! This year has been one of incredible ups and lots of uncertain downs, but these last few months have really blown by. I can't believe it but 12 episode since this podcast project was spawned during the depths of lockdown, we've already arrived at the last episode of this year! Today I'm so delighted to welcome onto the program, John Davis! John, as many of you will already know, is the CEO of the Australian Music Centre and has been the CEO of the AMC since 1995. He has been a great advocate and supporter of contemporary Australian Music and his work has been key for establishing and broadening the Australian music scene internationally, such as his representation of Australia as the Vice-President of the International Association of Music Information Centres and for the International Society for Contemporary Music. It's very exciting to have someone with such passion on the podcast, welcome John!

John Davis (JD): Hey, Hi Victoria.

VP: As usual, I'm wondering how to start and with your career, what was the journey for you to get to the AMC as well as your interest in classical music and experience beforehand?

JD: Yeah. I'm not sure I wasn't interested in classical music, per se. I mean, obviously, my education was very much about classical music in terms of learning the piano or learning the French horn or playing in the brass band had a different kind of slant to it. And then playing in a big band and learning jazz was had another aspect to it too. It's more of a sort of a diverse path in music rather than a path in classical music. And my childhood was filled with four pack Wesleyan hymns sung by the Pacific Islands, I was born and raised in Fiji, my father was a missionary. And so I had this sense of the baseline or the alto line, or the tenor line, very firmly embedded in my in my musical thinking from a very, very early age. And also perhaps a very rickety old piano that had too much mildew and the tropical climate eroding away a lot. And my mother playing Chopin with lots of squeaks and groans and out of tune this and me lying down on the floor behind the piano listening to the squeaks and groans and being fascinated by it. So after the some element of that in some of the directions I've taken in terms of my musical interest in my musical journey, so out of out of school, a very rich musical education a very privileged kind of context and into first year at Sydney University and I never knew what I wanted to do in music except it was going to be something to do with music and so I enrolled in it was an arts degree with music as a as a primary focus. And of course, not fitting in and

not quite feeling as though it was the right vehicle for me but loving some of the lectures and classes there. And some great classes some great people at Sydney University at the time, I didn't see much of big likely to Sculthorpe but Donald Kurt and Peter Plex and all of these names David earned even David earned well, classes there so sort of a bit of a taste of what I could glean here might might be like, and certainly the path of music and even experimental music and certainly a fair amount of ethnomusicology, musicology, ethnomusicology, musics of Asia and so on. Because obviously Sydney University was kind of like a touch point for those sorts of things, certainly at that time. And then the dropping out at the end of first year and running away to New Zealand and hanging around marriage as musicians for two years and hanging out coming back and wanting to return back to jazz back to Australia. And so, and then recently established as studies programme at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music doing some evening classes with Bill Matson and George Broadbent on a big band arranging and, you know, pulling apart how jazz was worked and how, how I might, might involve myself in that scene, saxophone lessons with private teachers, jazz piano with private teachers, including Chucky eights. And then circumstances took me and then I married and then took the we went down to South Coast to narrow and I spent all my hours on the piano developing my chops because I've never, I've never really developed a technique and particularly in the kind of jazz jazz kind of languages of music. So lots of technical exercises and rigorous training for a year or more. And I was going to psycho and my wife had enrolled in the then very new creative arts degree at Oregon University and she said look, as a as a visual artist and sculptor and she said, Look, you should you should come in. So I went in for an interview and they embraced me with open arms which was lovely and very vibrant. kind of environment. Because it was a relatively new course there are lots of artists of all sorts of different kinds who are quite mature in age and, and certainly with highly developed craft skills, or wanting to kind of put it into some kind of formal context in an academic or they'll be able to articulate the work that we're doing and be able to explore new ideas in that way. So very, very vibrant scene very gently, intergenerational kind of knowledge exchange and shared experiences. And this philosophy of learning about the creative arts from 20th century history of visual arts and theatre arts and ceramics and so on. So coming to music from that kind of perspective, taught me things that I've never been exposed to in in my form of music education's and seeing what happened in the 21st century. And why the politics, the social, social changes that were happening in different parts of the world, and what that meant in terms of how artists were responding to those things and where the parallel lines were in various art forms. Fascinating. And new staff there was being run by Edward Kelly, a composer from the UK and a newly arrived Andrew

Ford, and Andrew Ford, Andrew Schultz, and then later Barry Cunningham. But classes were filled with listening to lots and lots of music, lots and lots of new music, and with a strong emphasis on Australian repertoire and Australian composers.

And so hearing, for the first time, things like Barry Cunningham's ice carving, and a plethora of other Australian composers from different parts of the country and hearing the different kind of stylistic lines of connection and lines of relationship and the Sydney, Sydney scene versus the Adelaide scene versus the Melbourne scene and so on developing this, just through the listening exercise fascinating. And the lines of inspiration from the, from Europe, from Asia, from the Americas, the openness of our Australian composers were expressing themselves, we're talking here 1980s, okay. And then straight out of the eye, enrolling in a Master's part time, and I just I don't know what caused it, I think maybe I've been directed to go there, I was always aware of the Music Centre, and through my undergraduate studies, and I just sort of I think I ended up turning up there and seeing if there was any, any employment available. And just at the time, they were developing their sales, sales division, and so I was engaged at the age of 33, or something as a junior sales assistant. And prior to that, I'd worked in hospitality and gigs as a as a jazz pianist, solo and trios, done weddings, and piano bars and pub bands and all sorts of things before that. So, you know, then me getting my first real job as a junior sales assistant, the Australian Music Centre at the age of 33, thinking, Oh, perhaps I'll hang around here for a couple of years, see how it all strings together out or how the scene all works. And then I'll be a composer.

And you know, in the meantime, pursuing my part time studies, from classes. And then at some point after I'd finished my Masters soon after I finished my Masters, I think I recognised that. Here's all this music on the show, as you know, I was immersing myself in it as much as I possibly could, and looking through biographical files and listening to how particular composers work might develop over time, what their early interests were musically, and where they, you know, what journey that those things were always just incredibly, incredibly fascinating for me, to me. And then recognising the dinar, while I was interacting there with artists who were compelled to do what they do, they had to they have this compulsion to express themselves in this medium of sound. And, and I felt like a bit of a fake in a sense, because I wasn't doing it because I was compelled to do it. I was doing it because I could and I kind of felt it was kind of cheating in a sense that here were real artists who were really you know, doing it in such deep kinds of levels. And I was kind of taking it as much as I got older, I

understood far more that you know, we always we fake it until we sound convincing or we feel comfortable in doing it. You know that that is a part of the growth process creatively professionally, developing a craft or whatever, you're always trying different ways of faking it or trying to achieve particular kind of ends and sometimes you achieve it and sometimes you fall flat on your face and you learn from those lessons. This is a long, rambling answer to that question, Victoria.

VP: I don't mind, at all it's so interesting because I always wondered how you encountered the AMC and what it was like when you first started to be aware of it as an institution?

JD: In fact, my first interaction was much, much earlier than that. When I came back from New Zealand, and I was doing the Jazz Studies and so on, Eric Myers, who ended up running the New South Wales jazz coordinators, coordination Association, he was actually the jazz officer at the Australian Music Centre, and this would have been the 70s to 90s. And the Music Centre at that stage had this amazing reel to reel collection of Australian jazz. And I used to go into the Music Centre and just sit and listen, these big reel to reel tape recorders and all the recordings there and just spent hours listening to such a rich experience, and just was amazed at the resources. And you know, the fact is that sense of discovery of names I've never heard and then all of a sudden, once you'd heard something, and then you kept seeing their name everywhere. And you think how could I not have known about this person? It's funny how that happens. So that was my first thing I always known of the MCs existence. And that would have been, what three years after it was first established. And I've completely erased it from my memory. And I've moved on until I went back to Uni in Wollongong. And it was always a constant source of reference. And I've been a member since I was in first year Uni and I guess that's why I went there was just kind of this thing that was always there. And this thing that I had always was kind of like hallowed ground to my still emerging self.

VP: I can't tell when one is fully emerged.

JD: Well, me too. I'm still waiting to figure out what I'm going to do when I grow up.

VP: And well, how would you say the AMC has developed since then? Because I think a lot has happened and alone has grown?

JD: Yeah. Because in the night you gave me I was intrigued by the question in one sense and made me stop and think that you know, we're in we get this sense when we're and I've been in the organisation a long time, obviously, you have this sense that things are always moving and shifting forward and nuances are shifting to reflect the contemporary. And that's what you aspire to do always in an organisation that provides services for artists who are pursuing particular areas of practice.

So, I went back to the Constitution, in fact, and I'm thinking maybe this constitution got revised, this particular part of the Constitution got revised in the night air in the late noughties. There's only been a couple of times when the Constitution has been realised in MCs history. But, in the Constitution, it talks about fostering Australian composition in sound, which from a 1974 perspective is not a kind of expression you would expect. So that's why I'm thinking it's the 21st century by working with and on behalf of Australian composers and creative musicians. And that has a particular kind of inference as well, to advance the dissemination of their work. And then thinking more recently, you know, and being with the organisation a long time you have business plans and strategic plans and mission statements, and so on, which, which provide the touchstone for what you're what you're doing in a particular way your focuses. So, the current one, which finishes this year talks about representing Australian art music. Now, there's a specific terminology applied there, through our online services, because we've gone online and collection per se has been digitised pretty large extent, enabling universal access to resources and advancing the interests of Australian creators. There's that word in and their music.

And then the new strategic plan starting next year, talks in broad terms about services that connect Australian creators to the audience's enabling access, participation and engagement and broader goals of diversity and disability, education, technology, and so on and so forth. So, it's interesting how there's still that thing at the core where you have Australian artists in different way, in different areas of creative practice. And this service organisations responsibility of bringing visibility, enabling engagement and access to the artists and the content they create. And in the contemporary context, I guess the organisation provides pathways to interact and certainly to transact because it's the transaction that generates the royalty that goes back to the composer that results in the in the performance of the work which generates royalties, which results in the recording and broadcast of the work which also generates royalties. It creates this value chain that the organisation is trying to kind of lubricate,

I guess. and magnify. So, the terminology will be changing all the time about who the Australian Music Centre is and what it does.

VP: I've always wondered, I haven't gone over the one looking at all these other different companies. What is the difference from the AMC from say, a traditional publishing house? What kind of short talent an agency I suppose?

JD: Yeah. Well, they are important distinctions, your agency management, a publisher, a record label, even you know, in the, in the last century, the idea of an artist and I'm speaking very generically here, not necessarily about sort of the new music, music world, their aspiration, certainly popular music artists, their aspiration would be to sign with a label, and have all of their stuff looked after them. And then they would become stars, you know, that's the aspiration, or they'd have a manager who would get them gigs. And but I think, in the classical world, certainly they've been artists, management agencies who've had composers on their books, and certainly, publishers who publish you sign composers to exploit their copyrights on their behalf. I think there are many other pathways now that the marketplace and commercial viability of publishing is shifted significantly in the digital space has, has shifted the emphasis your print music, publishing doesn't mean a great deal anymore in terms of commercial return. synchronisation rights, and it used to be, you know, where music was putting a film soundtrack and had multiple screenings in multiple dimensions. And that used to be a big cash cow increase. And now with the streaming services, where the micro micro-micro payments are out of the way, and the sort of financial return for the utility of of an artist output, things continue to shift. What was the question?

VP: What's the distinction between the AMC and the traditional publishing house or agency?

JD: So, I think there's always gaps in because also you have to look at the ethical question of where a public subsidy is best applied. So, is it to areas where there is the potential for commercial return? Is it to areas where there are purely cultural kind of outcomes, that you know for the benefit of society more broadly, these are questions larger questions of cultural policy and cultural attitudes that are always shifting again and need to be navigated their career stages. But I think that the Music Centre has placed itself in the position of being a publicly subsidised organisation that on one level, you don't want to be competing with publishers, it's in everybody's interests, that there is a marketplace and a viable business for publishers to be

able to provide those services to particular kinds of composers where, where their works can be exploited. And that's a worthwhile commercial enterprise. And similarly, without as management agencies and all those sorts of things, you would want all those, those kinds of businesses running in the ecosystem to as a measure of its health, you want diversity of approaches and pathways and opportunities and so on. So it would tap into the publicly subsidised organisation, where the gaps are where the bridges need to be built, and where are the pathways of opportunity for those where the financial returns aren't necessarily sustainable? And then how do you do that, and then maybe find ways to earn incomes and make the business operation of the organisation a little bit more sustainable, and be able to create a little bit more impact? Yes.

VP: And actually, I was thinking because you read out bits of the Constitution before and you noted the use of the word creators, is that because we're trying to expand the definition of what a musical creative is, it's not just a traditional model of a composer being the person who creates all the music that we then play?

JD: I think it goes down to how to self-identify, and the concept of the composer of course, there are artists who identify in that way, and they practice reflects that kind of model of the composer who composes and they work out in, taken by others into other kinds of contexts to be realised or interpreted or. And there are sound, sound artists who are working with pure sound in many different kinds of contexts in many mediums. There are improvisers who are undertaking real time composition, in a sense, but a lot of those artists don't like the word composer, it raises other kinds of connotations that from a political lender and aesthetic perspective, they don't want to be associated with those kinds of those kinds of influences. And that's not everybody has a right to self-identify in that sense. And the challenge then is how do we find the right kinds of terminologies to I hate to say this, but categorise, well, you know, we all need to be developing our understanding of the landscape and develop our overview and have a challenge constantly and, and revise our sense of the landscape. As it shifts and changes and find new ways of expressing being able to describe it and Nothing can be fixed in concrete, you can't categorise things and put them in a box and say this is what it is. And that's the way it's always going to be in creative practice, because it's an evolutionary process. So, the terminologies need to reflect the constant context. And the time when I sort of hesitated earlier, when I spoke about some new music versus art music, you brought up the term classical music,

and I don't see whilst some of the strains in the areas that I work in, obviously come out of classical music traditions, in the contemporary context.

In Europe, they call the new music they call it contemporary music. In this country, contemporary music means something quite different, absolutely, quite different. And in the Americas, and perhaps in the UK, new music as a more generic kind of term that's applied to this. We kind of uncomfortably and awkwardly settled with the terminology, art music perhaps a decade or more ago, 15 years ago. And that was a way of saying it's notated composition, its composition in real time through improvisatory practices jazz, at least contemporary original jazz, in its many forms. And then that broad spectrum of experimental practice across music, sound of technology, electronica, computer music, sound installation sound out of place, sound of place landscape, many, many different noise, you know, many, many different kinds of disciplines, disciplines and modes of expression and pathways of creative practice. So how do you find a terminology that embrace that is all inclusive? Well, very different difficult art music doesn't quite do it, but it's the closest we've, we've got to this point. And nowadays, some people are saying more, it's just music, you know, and you know, I know jazz musicians who say, hey, it's just music. And, and while they might come out of jazz traditions, they don't necessarily identify as a jazz musician, per se, with their classification. They're a musician. And some of what they do might be out of great jazz traditions. And some of what they do might be out of 20th century European modernism, and some of what they do might be out of, you know, Persian classical traditions.

VP: So then, why do we still call it the classical music industry?

JD: Yes, why do we call it a classical music industry? Um, so who calls it a classical music industry? Okay, you have the you have, you know, one interpretation of that might be, then you're, you're talking about orchestras and ensembles, and all sorts of different kinds of musical practice, that is part of heritage traditions, in the broader sense of music of the past, that still may speak in the contemporary context, and still have relevance and be profound and, and provide a reference point for people to experience a shared a shared experience of truth, beauty, exploration, whatever the whatever the rationale might be. And I guess those same principles in in broad terms apply to the kinds of areas of music that I have worked in, and the kinds of artists I work with. But again, that that self-identification question comes up that what's the what's the what is the classical music industry? The industry implies that there's a commercial

liability to hurt that there's a there are artists earning money, there are agents working money, there are record labels earning money. And yeah, I'm not sure that in the context of contemporary contexts, it really can be seen specifically like that, because I think those large and very expensive structures are all really struggling. And it's not to necessarily question the value of them. But they're all struggling to find ways to be sustainable without huge injections or public subsidies. So, I wonder if it's an industry in that sense. Certainly, there's all sorts of ancillary employment and income provisions and so on, coming out of them. So, I guess in that sense, they are an industry but they're an industry that are run by this It needs to be subsidised in some way, whether it be public subsidies or private subsidies.

VP: And you mentioned the word heritage before and because there's a reliance on performing pieces from the past or kind of replicating potentially experiences from the past, do you think there's a chance that there will come a time hopefully not soon, but there will come a time where they feel disconnected from contemporary life, contemporary life and the public?

JD: As it happened in the digital arts, as it happened in theatre, as it happened in dance, I suspect this broader question about heritage and what it means it's not, you know, it has been used as a kind of a derogatory term. But there's something important about heritage and legacies and understanding understandings that are passed down, or reviewed or reinterpreted or challenged, even, you know, the mythologies around, practices being re-examined from a contemporary perspective. And, and new dimensions emerging from that, or new work coming out of those, those re-examinations that we have to work comes out of a reference point where no artist is inventing the wheel. Or very, very few, if any. It's always about modifying it in some way or questioning it or question. It's the function or, you know, how does the hexagon perform against the wheel? And how far will it take us off? What kind of a journey would that take us on? Often a bumpy one, but yeah, bumpy rides are sometimes the best rides.

INTERMISSION I:

VP: For the first of this episode's three intermissions which has been curated by John, is a work by the incredible Liza Lim. The work, *How Forests Think*, was dedicated to John and is performed here by the ELISION Ensemble in 2017.

Follows a 4-minute excerpt from Lim's How Forests Think

VP: Now I was thinking about the Australian Music Centre and because when I was a high school student, that was the place I would go to, to find new repertoire, particularly Australian repertoire and repertoire by women and contemporary women. So, I discovered lies a limb there, and Sarah Hopkins and Wendy Hiscocks - composers like that, and I will always wonder, I'm assuming for a lot of young students, whether they're Conservatorium or high school, that's the reference point to find new Australian repertoire. Do you find that it's the same when you're working with ensembles, even kind of larger ensembles like the Australian Chamber Orchestra?

JD: Not necessarily I think, I think the content that we have the data that we carry, is explored by all of those people, because they want to see what's what, who else is around? Who else Haven't they explored, and there are some, some organisations and ensembles and so and individual artists, for that matter, who want to empower themselves with their understanding of the landscape and chart their own course through that landscape with it, with only passing reference to what else might be available, because they want a particular journey. And with a particular, you know, pathway in mind, and that's fine, too. There's no problem with that at all. But certainly, you know, in New South Wales, at least, the high school requirements for Australian content, yes, has proved a huge, huge opening of doors for younger musicians to explore their own world, their, their place, the music of their place, and, and their time, because there's a 25-year music of the last 25 years, stipulations. I am come to an understanding, there are composers, there are composers who live in my Southern, there's a composer who lives in the next street. And these are composers, they're human beings who I might meet, and I could, and indeed, there have been occasions where you know, in areas where there hasn't been a lot of repertoire available for unusual kinds of instruments and so on, where we've suggested look history for three or four composers who live not far, far away from you. Just go get in touch with them and, and ask them if they'd be interested in writing a, you know, piece of controversy for you. And more often than not a composer would be filmed a bit to be able to have that kind of engagement and, and, you know, writer work for them. And you can imagine for young students, this is work on performing it was written for me for me playing this instrument and that sense of connection. And yeah, the all sorts of possibilities can come from that, and ending the whole musical pathways. And you've obviously come along a musical journey as a result

of that experience too. And it's raised your awareness and your understanding of the landscape and who's around and what's what and charted your course in navigating through the lens of the landscape that you you're navigating through.

VP: It might sound silly, but not until I was 16. Did it ever occurred to me that there will be this huge population of composers that I could physically meet because it was still living because up until that actual agency course I we didn't study music from living composers.

JD: Do you remember what you played for your HSC exams?

VP: Yes, it was a Piper at the Gates of Dawn by Wendy Hiscocks.

JD: Yes.

VP: That was great. It was an amazing piece. But although I never wrote to her, I don't know if she's still there. She's still here.

JD: There's a London, yes.

VP: So maybe I should write to her.

VP: Well, in fact, we're talking about education I was looking at, I think, some statistics, I think it's from five years ago from the AMC were predominantly more than 50% of your membership are actually from music educators.

JD: On the education sector more broadly. Yes. And that that tends to be senior high school because of the syllabus requirements, particularly in New South Wales, other states do have an emphasis on Australian content as an option, but it's not a mandatory part of the syllabus. And then in the tertiary sector, obviously, too, because there's an increasing focus on the train content there. To the point where now I think there are it's obligatory for performers in their undergraduate years for their final year for the interview recitals to include Australian repertoire, or end repertoire by a female composer. Monash for example, it's mandatory now.

VP: Okay, I didn't know that, that's brilliant. Actually, on that note, there was a speech I think you gave in 2014. I think I must have watched it remotely. Where you spoke about the AMC representing 25% of their represented artists were females, which one was the highest percentage internationally at that point?

JD: Well, yeah, it's equal. It's been a little while since the sets were done, but we ranked equal first with the Estonians. But those statistics have kind of plateaued out for the last few years around the 2526. I think we're at 26 point something percent now. But then that shift has been a very slow and gradual shift. Since in the early 90s, Sally McCarthy did a lot of research into this area when the first composing women's Festival was held. And MCs, then journal sounds Australian published two different editions, I think, looking at the woman composer, terrible, terrible title. But I think in those days, the representation rates were around 11%. I think, what if we're talking about statistics, I think there are all sorts of issues relating to that about what comes out of the training institutions, the training pathways, and what how the gender balance shifts considerably through the pedagogical journey, I guess, in composition, and then into professional practice emerging the emerging artists into professional practice. Many, there are many kind of points where barriers exist or difficult exist in, in, in the pathways that people follow, which also have an influence. But I think there's a far more generic awareness of those issues, and far more consciousness to be proactively addressing those issues in a very direct kind of way. So yes, absolutely.

VP: So, in a sense, does the AMC have a role beyond curator ship in the sense that you represent different artists, you select them and their works, and then you disseminate them, both nationally and internationally. But also, I think they emcee for me at least feels like it's very proactive in terms of the programmes that it puts forth. So, you have the First Nations composers programme, the is it Nurra Burria? As well as your international relationship with programmes and at a conference like classical deaths.

JD: Where there was a term you used at the start of that, or the curatorial thing? It's not so much a curatorial thing. I mean, there are particular things that we do where there is some level of curatorial input, I guess, it's not about the artists that become represented at IMC. Artists become represented through an eligibility criteria. And if they match the criteria they're in, if they meet the criteria they're in, there's no kind of curatorial thing saying, we'll take you and you and you and sorry, houses fall for the moment, at least at this point. And there is, so it is

quite a no, there's an open thing, so long as it goes eligibilities are achieved. There's all kinds of questions about the pathways to achieve those eligibilities, which is another question. And maybe that's something that we might cover when we talk about the equity diversity kinds of questions, access kinds of questions. But if there are curatorial influences that we apply might be through how we convene assessment panels for awards, awards, the art music, awards, panel, assessment panels and so on, or this year in particular, when we had the commissions to begin with and then the momentum Commission's which it's been a really interesting year, from that point of view, the generosity of people to want to help people out. And so, you have to run these processes, which, by nature competitive, but I guess we do put in some kind of curatorial process into convening panels. I think, for a long while we've had a decision. A decision informing matrix, I guess you'd call it used to be the four G's announced the five G's, and we've always been very, very conscious and sensitive to geographies. Because pre the digital world, AMC was a physical collection of materials and an office in Sydney. And that meant that the way that people engaged from it from other parts of the country had particular kinds of barriers, and we were working for so long to you know, try and break down those barriers and doing postage Free Library loans and toll free telephone lines and you know, in that day and age sounds prehistoric now, but they were sort of major step forward to say well, you know, even if you're in Perth, you can borrow some borrow from the library. Various geography, the gender question, obviously, certainly, since the late 80s and early 90s, that question of representation in balancing things and ensuring that representation was visible and present in the decision makings, more generally. genre in the sense of style aesthetic because all as I mentioned early on there that question of the diversity of, of practice the diversity of stylistic and aesthetic preference that artists pursued, sometimes multiple Li over a course over a course of the creative life. That also you can't you can't be an organisation that has only people who represent particular flavours of, of musical expression. So that question that genre is always, always upfront as well.

So, as I said, geography, gender, genre, generally generational race representation, increasingly, this is something that perhaps most in the last decade or so. So when you have panels that you make sure that there are younger voices, they're not only to express what they know, but also to learn from others who enters. So the legacy of those kinds of processes is a is a shared experience where understandings are learned, you know, people are going through that experience, hear other people's perspective in an assessment kind of context. And that provides them with language or a different way of looking at things or a way to measure their

level of understanding of the broader context of all kinds that applicants may be presenting themselves from. And then increasingly, I guess we call it the global one, this critical question about diversity and diversity in all senses of the word.

So that, you know, just by having those things as a as a reference point, whenever you're making a decision, and you don't always hit the mark every time. And you know, if you're only got a panel of three people, obviously, you can take over all five of those boxes. *But by just being conscious that that's the kind of a decision making matrix that you're you use as a touchstone, it really shifts the shifts the outcomes, it shifts, the way that things are constructed, it shifts the way that discussions take place within those processes. And it shifts the way that it shifts the outcome of the process to see. So, would you say that kind of holistic approach is something you would encourage that maybe other institutions take on board? I think, well, it goes back to those questions, too. And how do we how do we come to see clearly the biases that that we have ourselves, I say that in the broader community kind of sense of where what biases do we bring to the table? And what are we missing out on one way, other way, when we're having a discussion asking that question, for example, what's missing, what's the voice that's missing around this table that would have an important would make an important contribution to the discourse. Just being conscious and sensitive to those things, enables all sorts of change to occur in very subtle and, but powerful ways.*

INTERMISSION II:

VP: For our second curated by John Davis intermissions, is an excerpt from a previous Declassify guest, composer Brenda Gifford. Here is an excerpt from her work, *Mungala*, meaning clouds in the Duggarra language, performed by NYC flautist, Claire Chase.

Definitely, I was talking to some of my family members, some, most of them are not people who go to classical music concerts, and asking them about things they want to hear. And a lot of them are younger, and they would love to hear more, I suppose we would term it as new

music or new art, music and music from living people. But they feel intimidated to go to a concert hall because then a small ensemble or something they would never think of. So they wouldn't think of classical music as being in a big concert hall with an orchestra or maybe going to the opera. But they feel intimidated by the chance or the really high chance of listening to late 19th century, early 20th century music or music before that period. Do you think there is a chance particularly now in the pandemic Now that everything slowed down for things to reform, and potentially for these bigger organisations to move forward by including more new and local works?

JD: Yeah, look, *I think there's a growing understanding of in that world have the obligation to be exploring the new and to be inventing a future for that massive machine, those massive machines that are, you know, struggling to, to move forward. And I guess the larger question is to our How is the relevance in the broader Australian society things? How is their relevance being portrayed and justified?*

I mean, the challenges we all face, not just not just in terms of orchestras, for example, but any kind of specialised perceivably Elite pursuit. I think in the contemporary world, those kinds of that kind of expertise and specialisation is being questioned generally, why do you need that? Why? Why do you need that level of knowledge understanding when you've got Google and I think that's kind of an unconscious thing across society that specialisation and expertise is a very, very important thing. If you don't have people who can challenge and explore and discover new ways of looking or hearing or, or making or whatever their activity is in very much poorer society. I've moved away slightly from what you've said, I think but it's not to say that invention hasn't been there for a long time. It's not to say those explorations haven't been there for a long time. Cushing concepts in the 1960s, the series that John Hopkins the conductor, the problems was doing at the Sydney Town Hall, and lots and lots of new music, lots of different ways of listening experiences being presented. And in the more current context, you know, different kinds of venues other than concert halls and trying to shift the status quo or test it or, or give a different kind of experience to different kinds of audiences.

For large structures, there's lots of risk attached to that. And I'm in financial risk because you only need one, one financial failure to you know, sabotage, your whole year or two, it might take you two or three years to recover from it. No big international new music festivals, for example, who there's been 10 years preparing for their festival and to have all the international

participants come to in the ICM, for example, in the International Society of music. Where the member of ICM after hosting the festival, lemon bankrupted you'd, you wouldn't say that they do that at ICM for another five or six years until another generation of people sort of re-establish themselves and came forward. So, there's lots of risk involved in that sort of thing. And our desire to continue to be exploring the new and so on should be it should be something that, you know, we always exercise in sensible kinds of ways. Do you think there's been a chance opened up now for experimentation because we have to digitally produce and present things? That's curious, isn't it? Of course, that innovation thing of how then do we reach out? How do we how do we retain our presence and our visibility? And how do we connect with that sound? Well, I've found it quite difficult myself, actually. And just, well, we have been our brewery concept is set last week or the week before in Sydney, and ensemble offspring playing just as soon as they started playing just the sound of a live instrument in my ears, which I hadn't heard for nine months. With something quite startling. And my neighbour is about to go down to an Iso concert later this week. Again, she hasn't been for all the years, she hasn't been since last year.

And I that's one thing she's really looking forward to because and she could she devours all online performances from Europe in the US. And she's she's she's obsessively consuming all that stuff, but just hasn't had that real experience. So I'm not sure I think what's done is open up other pathways of how we other dimensions to how we communicate with each other. And it's highlighted the but what we've lost also that the ritual and shared experience of gathering together to attend the performance and the interactions in the foyer and the anticipation when people sit down and all of those things that we take for granted when we're experiencing them. But I mean, huge amount they are, they're a part of the entire experience that it's not just about the music being played, so many other things associated with it. The interaction between the musicians and sometimes the cameras might be able to capture that and other times, it's not sort of like a static camera in the auditorium focus on the stage and you don't get those nuances of you know, in a string quartet the first violin look for raising an eyebrow on the cello and a little smile comes on both phases are those things that make magic and where you're watching the theatre of the performance in a very intimate and direct kind of way where we miss those things. I miss those things.

VP: No, I miss being in a room with other people experiencing something collectively. Because now I was thinking the other day watching an online concert I was in my bed in my pyjamas

watching a whole orchestra play on stage and it felt very fuzzy. I felt like I was being disrespectful. I felt completely disconnected to the people playing this one.

JD: Notice you all still dressed in their blacks.

VP: And not just in my pyjamas.

JD: They would have been just grateful that you are one of the statistics that logged in reaching people. That's what they were doing it for. They wanted to support one of them same as statistics. At the end of the night, hey, our AP Music Awards earlier this year the virtual realisation of so normally we have a live event with maybe 300 350 people. And yes, it's a huge love fest and a gathering of the clan and the

Seeing people from different parts of the country and catching up and a real sense of belonging and connectedness. And we were really uncertain about how the virtual realisation might go. And so watching the Denbigh, there were about five or 600. Okay, that's not that's not earth shattering by any means. But then the stream was up there for a month. And we ended up with over 4000 views of the, of the show. For us, that's, you know, that's quite reasonable kind of a figure for, for that event, in the way that was presented to reach that many people was very satisfying. So, will you keep a digital version of the ones going alongside the physical for? Yeah, well, that raises the question. So, we're, in fact, we're about to do the entry into the preparations for next year's right now and the meeting next week to look to review this year and to then start exploring what decisions he made about how it might be made manifest. Or even if it can be done as a physical event next year? we don't we don't even know that yet. That's true. I'm not sure either. I admit it. I think it's really being very responsible. In its in its approach. Yeah. And that's absolutely unnecessary. I think. So, but look, at least we've discovered that it can be done really effectively, and an enormous and an overwhelmingly positive response to it too. And we know that can be done.

V: Ah I see. Now I have a really broad question. I just thought of it. Because you're essentially at the forefront of where Australian music is going both in that you see the newer, you shook your head, both and that you see the new people who are emerging and coming up generation after generation, and you have a sustained approach to how Australia sitting nationally and internationally, and in the face of increasing cynicism, are you hopeful?

JD: hugely hopeful. Firstly, that sense of Australians have something to say we have perspective on the world, that means something. And the rest of the world looks at Australia as being this kind of distant well, relatively environmentally cleaner, safer. Relatively, I'd say that in the broader context of the environmental issues that we face from the ravages of the population and the industry of Europe and North America and the ravages that those cultural industrial edifices have on the environment. And so there's this the sense of Australia being this one dimensional thing of coilovers, and kangaroos and wide open spaces. And the idea that there are Australians who can present viewpoints and perspectives and understandings that go way, way beyond what the expectations are, is sometimes a surprise, you know, in a patronising kind of way, I guess. But we're often patronised. And certainly that question of distance is something that's never really respected or, or dealt with appropriately from a European context. For example, you know, I'm at meetings at midnight from midnight to 2am for God's sake. And and when you sort of put in a request to say, Well, can we have it at a more reasonable hour so that the rest of the world might be able to participate in more civilised way they recognise the question being asked, and they recognise the challenges but but making the compromise to accommodate that is, we talked about barriers of access and inclusion and so on. But my God, Australia, artists are at the forefront, they're the most globally mobile, at least they were before COVID. Everywhere you went in the world, that'd be a bloody Australia out there doing something. Because ultimately, Australian artists at some point in their, in their lives have to travel and because the world is only so big in this country, in terms of where they can practice or what opportunities they can pursue and so on. And you're doing that yourself. And you've done that in the past too. And that's been a part of your portfolio how you function. And and so that's a magic. There's lots of other younger generations who are also globally mobile for similar kinds of reasons. But I would say the Australians and the Kiwis to our Kiwi cousins also have that have that quality to them too. And our viewpoint on the world is different to the the head of heritage burden, European perspectives, or the I can't even say what the North American perspectives are now anymore because so much is in in flux and Limbo there. But in the 20th century, for example, you know, North America had a particular kind of place in the world. at a particular way of influencing, thinking and popular cultures and, and, and indeed high cultures as well. So yes, of course, I'm hopeful and optimistic and watching, watching artists find their feet and find their voice and more than that start running forward and taking huge leaps and bounds. And that is the most astounding, wonderful thing to be, to have the privilege to observe. But it's the artists who are defining the future, it's always the artists who

are defining the future and, and, you know, all buggers like me sort of watching from behind and thinking, wow, understanding perhaps, some sense of a spectrum of context and recent histories and so on, and how things are being sensitive to the fact that things change and things. Changes are endless, some forward moving dynamic that we have much to be proud of, and we're producing, we could produce a lot more. And we could do it much better too. Because my god data set to work bloody hard to be able to find their pathways and find ways to sustain themselves. We could be doing that better.

JD: I might add another dimension to that, because I've just had a couple of conversations with a couple of artists in other places living in other places in Australia and other places in the world. And this question of where they feel they belong, or their sense of where home is, or where, or, or that sense of connection and belonging as a general generic thing. One is Nirmali Fenn, Sri Lankan Australian composer with Sri Lankan heritage. So, she, I think she did an undergraduate in Melbourne, and then postgraduate in Oxford, and then teaching in Asia in Hong Kong, and then Singapore, and now she's in the US. And that sense of where her where she feels her sense of connection might be, and how it's a kind of a, it's not a clear, it's not a clear thing for her. And the other one is Kate Moore, who lives in the Netherlands, and did undergraduate in Canberra, and then had a year in Paris at the Conservatoire in Paris, and then has been in the Netherlands. And we had an exchange where the right to be an artist living where you want to live, and identifying as you want to identify and undertaking work inspired by whatever you want it to be inspired by whatever inspires you. And that's the right. And it's for others to perhaps put people in boxes and categorise them and say, Oh, you belong here, and you belong there. And this is your style. And that's your style. And that's part of the way that we all try and come to an understanding of the world by you know, this thing is more that this thing is more of that and so they're different. But yes, this is the 21st century, on planet Earth. And so that sense of connection or belonging or sense of place, is an important feature in all our lives and how we individually interpret that is, is our right and our privilege and our responsibility to do that, too.

INTERMISSION III:

VP: For our third and final curated intermission, John has selected a work by another Australian composer, Jon Rose. This excerpt, PETRICK, from his series of works *Whistling in the Dark*, is performed by trombonist Simon de Haan with field recordings by Hollis

Taylor.

VP: I was just thinking, as you said that about all the boxes, and I realised when you write or fill out a grant application or request funding, suddenly you're writing yourself into these boxes, because there's a requirement to do so. So, that kind of links in with what you said before, does it do you think we could foster a better environment for artists? And what strategies do you think would be helpful?

JD: As a service organisation, we need to be providing relevant services. So just going back a little bit, there's nothing wrong with the boxes. And as a composer, to use that specific term, composers have always been commissioned to write for specific purposes or specific contexts or for a specific occasion or, or, you know, in the orchestral saying perhaps as a as the standard eight-minute concert opener. And that's a division. And so, you know, you write if you accept the condition, there's, I guess there's an obligation on the one hand To write for purpose, and fulfil, fulfil the brief. And certainly, that's the case with people working in film, for example, it's often the music comes in the last point, but it's not. The point of it is not the music. The point of it is how does the music then amplify what, what's already there? How does it enhance it further? How does an amplifier? How does it engage the audience to come along for the ride?

VP: Well, I always wonder like how the tension between being classified or non-classified is often there because you're, you know, when you even if you meet a stranger, they ask you what style of music you're in, and I always fail to answer that question. And yet, at the same time, I feel like I should really know the answer to that question. So, what kind of strategies do you think could be in place in which to, in which to support or foster a more artistic environment?

JD: I think, in fact, the current context is assisting this to looking at questions about community well being, and what binds communities together and how the communities are refined their voices, or expressed their identities and those kinds of things. It is through stories and song and these things have a power of a power and have a way of connecting people in the powerful kinds of ways. And so in some senses, the potential resurgence of acknowledgement of the power of that power. And that provides some really interesting opportunities potentially,

how they are to be realised that's another question. It's interesting in the most recent, this current parliamentary inquiry into cultural and creative industries is mentioned in those terminologies and those terminologies that are in there too. I was interested in looking through all of the submissions for that and particularly a new approach this some collaboration between several philanthropic bodies, think tank on cultural matters account cultural, countercultural exploring statistics, and coming up with recommendations and Pathways Forward. And not only in their submission to the inquiry, but also in many of the others looking at this development framework for sport, Australian sport 2030. So, it sets the kind of a broad brushstroke agenda for the pathway through to 2030, for sport, from the most elite levels down to the most grassroots level. And the proposal Being that this is what we need in the cultural in the creative industry sectors, given the levels employment and income generation, export earnings and so on that the sector's earn. This is a path where governments of different kinds of colours and persuasions, it would be a no brainer for them to embark on that kind of a journey for to develop a plan for cultural and creative industries along the same kind of lines. And that's quite a powerful and potent way of expressing it rather than saying, you know, classical music is good.

Or, you know, it puts it in a much larger societal kind of context, the language of that is quite clearly understood it's embracing of many different ways of creating expressions and, and the businesses and sustainable commercial promise of most sustainable commercial models through to them, most subsidy Reliant models. It's all inclusive in that kind of sense.

And it takes us on a path where these things are thought through and invested in as a matter of benefit to our society. It's quite a powerful, potent kind of argument and a very practically practical pragmatic one at the same time.

VP: Because during this pandemic, I imagine everyone who is isolated or in quarantine or just at home during lockdown, you turn to the arts for some sense of solace or connection because. We don't have the chance to leave our spaces anymore.

JD: And reflection, there's more time for reflection. What do you do in that? I mean, you could watch television all the time. That's okay. But I think I think lots of people are listening to music of different kinds in ways that they haven't listened to it before. Remembering or call

revisioning what music really reconnecting or rediscovering what music they really like. or what musics they have that the times call for their sensitivities and sensibilities that wouldn't necessarily people would have time to consider. Yes, so maybe there were huge opportunities out of that, too.

VP: I hope that there's some sort of newfound not appreciation, but love of the arts, just because of what it can bring for you, then that it doesn't feel like a luxury anymore.

JD: Actually, just something to add about how we are defining a culture or how are we seeing ourselves in a world of that is where the colonisation of structures and so on is increasingly important. And for Nate First Nation once voices are increasingly important, perhaps even more so given the disparity that exists across race society. And I was at again, it was a kind of like a cultural policy exploration kind of session a couple of years ago where it was put this thing about First Nations first always and if you have this cultural ecosystem with First Nations voices, and it's very cool in a very natural way, the rest of the ecosystem will look after itself because of the principles and values and, and ways of seeing and hearing and thinking that comes that emanate from that as a call from the call. And it's an image that reinforces itself time and time again, in my thinking these days that time and indeed the experience with nara boreum I should say some more words about that, because it's something that's been a revelation and the learning and most privileged learning situation for, for me as a person in in multiple kinds of ways with Chris Sainsbury, composer and man who's now teaching at a in new in Canberra came to me with this idea and it was just a no brainer of how do you build parts of access to in First Nations musicians already proficient in other areas and already exercising their art making in other areas? How do you bring them into the provide them with access into the art and music world?

So, this concept of you know, getting two years of workshops and concerts and creation of works to four or five First Nations artists, and just watching these, these artists occupy the space with the confidence and with things to say with powerful things to say and that and really wanting to say that say it to these voices. The power of these voices being expressed just came as a, as a natural consequence of it, and cause me to think many times, and I have reflected many times in terms of the kind of language that I was using, or the methodology or the idea of running a project is that, you know, you have these milestones and the timelines, and here's the outcomes. And here's the way that you get the funding that's been invested. And, and it's just a way of thinking where you throw all that stuff out of the window, and you just spend time together. And yes, you do have goals and aims. And you you're on a journey with a particular kind of destination, or about at least, stopping points and starting points and the on the ongoing journey. But it's a way of interaction and thinking it's not about the dots on the paper, or the sound, or it is about April coming together and sharing that experiences as the primary connecting point.

And it's not about you know, spending time in the workshop and clocking in clock out, and then everybody splits up to go and have lunch and stuff. It's just hanging out together as the hanging out time that brings the most understanding and the most learnings in the broadest possible sense and a shared learning environment that's filled with generosity and wonderment and fun with all those other kinds of artificial impositions, just you know, becoming secondary, and yet they're all met, all those obligations are met. It's just a different way of doing it.

It's been such a revelation. And it's something that I would like to see, continue on forever. And look, some of the artists who are passing through it are all incredible in their own, each in their own ways. And as I said, the stories that they tell through the works, that they create, the

stories they wanting to tell, deep and profound and beautiful and challenging, and painful, you know, a mixture of all of those kinds of emotions. And it brings up those questions about diversity and inclusion and access and elitism. It's a class issue as well. It's about power and class And who are we really in Australian society, where we're famed for the so called Australian values of fair go and level playing fields and anti-establishment and anti-authority and so on. And yet, so much of what we do is determined by those kinds of things by decisions made behind closed doors without clear, clear rationales transparent rationales.

Yeah, these are really important questions in our time. And if we are to build ourselves, community music that is about exploring new voices, new ways of expression, new, new directions. These things need to be embraced in a holistic way. We need to be viewing things like an ecosystem, we can't view things in a straight line or one dimensionally, we have to be looking for always scratching the surface to look deeper and deeper and deeper into new into subtleties and nuances that don't stop there.

VP: That was brilliant. Thank you so much for your time and for talking with me. I've learnt a lot and I'm certain that those who are tuning will much to think about – go and support Australian Music and find some repertoire at the Australian Music Centre! I'll pop those links below and in the transcript for everyone to find them.

JD: Thank you, Vickie.

VP: Once more, a big thank you to John for this conversation, and in fact, the last one of this year! Just as we round out the end of the crazy year that has been 2020, thank you to every person who has listened to this podcast so far, and thank you for your support – I've seen all your Instagram messages and they've been lovely! Declassify still has another 3 more episodes programmed for this season – a performer, a music critic and an economist – so I hope to see

you all then. In the meantime, have a great Christmas and holiday season and catch you all in the new year!

DECLASSIFY is a podcast available for listening and subscription on Spotify and Apple Podcasts. It is hosted and produced by Victoria Pham.

RESOURCES

John Davis

<https://iamic2020.miz.org/speakers/john-davis>

Australian Music Centre

<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/>

Interviews

<https://themusicnetwork.com/hot-seat-john-davis-ceo-australian-music-centre/>

John's Op-Ed: The significance of 'art music' in Australia -

<https://theindustryobserver.thebrag.com/op-ed-amc-ceo-john-davis-on-the-significance-of-art-music-in-australia/>

Australian Music: <http://www.realtimearts.net/article/issue53/6967>