

Claire Edwardes
S2E3:
MOVING BEYOND
SONIC
CONDITIONING

20th of September. 2021.

Welcome back to Declassify Season 2! I am so pleased to welcome you all back to this new season, and most importantly, to begin this following season with a host of international guests and conversations. I am so pleased, not only to have returned, but to welcome Declassify's third guest for the season, pioneering percussionist Claire Edwardes. Claire is a leading percussionist working as a soloist, recording performer and chamber musician and is the current Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring. She is a forefront figure for the commissioning and performance of contemporary Australian music having premiered works by composers such as Harrison Birtwistle and Elena Kats-Chernin. Claire remains the only Australia to have won the 'APRA Art Music Award for Excellence' by an individual three times. Across this episode, Victoria and Claire unpack the myth of meritocracy, new programming, educational models and the need to break the cycles of sonic conditioning.

Victoria Pham

Hello everyone! And we're back – already with the third episode of this season. It feels like it's going so quickly. This week is a pretty special one, especially for me, as I have watched this performer and Artistic Director since I was in high school. I am very excited to welcome the incredible Claire Edwardes onto the podcast for episode 3. Claire is a leading percussionist working as a soloist, recording performer and chamber musician and is the current Artistic Director of Ensemble Offspring. She is a forefront figure for the commissioning and performance of contemporary Australian music having premiered works by composers such as Harrison Birtwistle and Elena Kats-Chernin. Claire remains the only Australia to have won the 'APRA Art Music Award for Excellence' by an individual three times. So without further ado, welcome Claire to Declassify!

Claire Edwardes

Hi Vickie, Yes. Thank you for having me on!

Victoria Pham

Well, I've always been interested in how you got to where you are, not specifically just with you, but also your reputation as a soloist, because I've seen you perform so many times with orchestras. And as a soloist, and also the fact that you teach at the con, how did that happen? Well, you had this amalgamation of all these different streams of music that have now joined together?

Claire Edwardes 03:12

Intrinsically, as a musician, you never you sort of get taught not to rely on one income stream or one thing as the only thing that you would do. And so I guess there's definitely an element of that. But of course, they're all intrinsically related, you know, one feeds into another. So the teaching is, I wouldn't say teachings, my main thing by any means, and I don't even think I'm the best teacher in the world, necessarily. But I try. And in my teaching, I really like to impart my own personal priorities, I guess, in my career, which isn't a typical career for a percussionist because I think a lot of students at the con get taught and go through that degree with the assumption that they're going to join an orchestra one day. So it's, it's a kind of weird thing, for me as someone who's not in an orchestra to be their teacher. And it feels like a little bit of an uphill battle, kind of convincing them of the fact that there is an alternative, you know, And that, to me seems so weird in this day and age, like there's a finite number of percussion jobs in orchestras in Australia, and the world of course, and I feel like it's much more realistic how I've built my career in this day and age because I have control as a mother as well. I have control over my schedule. So as the artistic director of ensemble last spring, I, I make all the schedules and I can sort of fit that in around as my kids have grown up. That's been able to reflect that. So it's a pretty fortunate position to be in. I think, being able to balance all these things. I never get bored because when I am able To perform, I only would do you know, a handful of concertos with an orchestra year. And I love it. I would never only want to do that though, because it's it's a lonely thing to do so. So I feel very lucky, I think with where my career has ended up because it's, it's the through the combination of all the different things I do, I get so much satisfaction.

Victoria Pham

Peace of mind. so fascinating. All right, having a little bit more control over how your your life is, is perhaps something that a lot of my younger musician, friends, who all of whom, who are who are performing and who have, as you said, trained to just take orchestral roles they haven't considered yet. So right now, a lot of them are doing all the audition routes, internationally, and all the competition tournament's internationally as well.

Claire Edwardes

So I think I think, yeah, they get taught how to do auditions, for example, and then this, this assumed thing, what maybe it's slightly more they're getting taught, but it's still not enough, I don't think is, is all the other things that you need to say run your own business. You know, make your own career as a soloist, all the communication that's required the administration, the budgeting, you know, all those things. I find that exciting, like, I find that way more exciting than practising except, and, but I think a lot of people think, why would I complicate my life with all that other stuff I don't even want to do. So yes, it's not for everyone. But I think it's probably for more people then. Then they assume? Yeah.

Victoria Pham

Because I don't remember when I was studying at the con, maybe it's a bit different because I'm a composer. But at the same time, I wasn't really learning the business skills, or I wasn't taught, for example, like how to look for funding, or that I should look for funding or how to ask for money for grants and things like that. That was something I learned after I left the Conservatorium.

Claire Edwardes

Helpful skill I helped a lot of young people with with doing grants and especially to do with on some of our spring through our hatched Academy. I'm very kind of force coming with my help and my assistance and my advice, and with all my years of experience, because I really feel for younger people, because the it's not set up to sort of for them to have success. You know, they're they're going against people like me who have experienced during grants, so and you don't learn how to do it. And I'm very, very happy. And I think it's important that people like me do help younger people with that process, because it's, it's not easy. It's not an easy one to navigate. But once you know how to do it, of course, the world's your oyster to a certain degree.

Victoria Pham

Yes, thank you to to mentors like you, because I wouldn't have been able to make it make it through those first few grants, because I also get help from from opposition teachers, there was no way for me to understand how that system worked without them. Yeah. Oh, good. Well, I have to say, it's a bit different over here in England, I just wrote my first grant here. And there's a section in the grant, which isn't in the ones in Australia, which is slightly concerning to me. But there's a section in the grant that asks you to detail how much experience you've already had with grants, and prove Yeah, and to prove, like administrative skills and how, you know, previous projects that you've been in charge of in terms of distributing funds or budgeting. I thought, wow, that will be really difficult if you're 18 or 17. You haven't had your foot through the door yet.

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, I mean, in a way, it's good, because it means that hopefully, they'll have a different system of judging the application. If you say that you have ever done it before. you'd hope Yeah, that's interesting. I assumed it was for that reason, and now I'm realising it's probably not. But anyway, Oh, God, that is a bit scary,

Victoria Pham

And kind of keeping with how the trajectory of your career has transformed over the last 20 to 30 years. Did you ever have a like musical vision when you first started studying percussion at the Conservatorium and how has that changed and developed along with your career?

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, that's a good question. I mean, I'm not that old. By the way, the here I'm 45. So I wouldn't say I've had a crisis. 30 years. That would be fun to play young. Well, I do, but I definitely wasn't making money when I was 15. But, you know, I went into the con knowing I've already made a choice. That wasn't the most mainstream choice. I made a choice not to be a concert pianist. I knew I could be a concert pianist or an accompanist and, and because I got nervous, I got to a really high level on piano. And I got really nervous. And, and I worked out that I wasn't really cut out to be a concert pianist, although I had the musical skills like I got my L mass and I was really quite, you know, skilled pianist, but I thought I I don't really want to be an accompanist my whole life. Like I knew I enjoyed playing with other people. But that sort of that role of being an accompanist I knew it wasn't quite my personality. So I thought that's when I had the idea to do percussion. So I had sort of taught myself during high school but I'd never really had lessons. So it was quite a kind of going out on a limb to decide to study percussion as in a bachelor course. And, and I think for me, it was the right one musically, like if I think about that I was a professional pianist. Now I could be someone like Zubin, you know, doing kind of quite cutting edge stuff with my instrument, and he does amazing things. But I think percussion as much as I hate lugging the instruments suits me more, because it is intrinsically dealing with things in a different way. Because we have to, you know, we don't have that repertoire that piano has. And so I think it was gradual at the con i i met composers through this class that we have code, cpW, composer, performer workshops, I'm sure you know it, Vicki. miss it, I used to be a cpW mentor for ages. And since COVID, they've been doing it differently. And I haven't done it for quite a few semesters, and I miss it. Because I love cpW, it's this, this bringing together of composers and performers, which in a way feels so forced at uni, you know, like because their performance don't want to need the performance though. And so I would always take those classes as the lecturer and kind of say, like, let's we're all in this together. There's no one upmanship no one's better than anyone else. You know what, this is a process, we need each other. We're doing this together. And I because I remember when I was a student, it wasn't really like that. And all the performance, just try and get out of it all the time. But I somehow I loved it. Like I love that process of, of working with the composers on music that they were creating in real time. And then that's what led to the spring ensemble. And we were invited to play in Roger wood wood Spring Festival, and I met Damien ricketson and Matthew solarmovies. And then I guess this is this, this thing of just playing music that was different and wasn't like whatever else was doing was just got in my blood. And I was I was the person at the library, like trying to find was before the internet, trying to find all the pieces that no one else was doing in their recital, you know, and so I always wanted to do things differently, I think but I don't think I was conscious that that would lead to this, if you know what I mean, at that time.

Victoria Pham

But will unfold with time?

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, actually with that the cpW when I did it at the con, I'm still in touch with all of those musicians that I was loving. So actually, anyone who's studying it now, don't try and miss it. You'll make the Best Musical bonds through taking that class. Yeah, I agree. Yeah, it was a great time. And we wrote for such a weird ensemble grouping. No way. Yeah, no, she really pushed my study. So no, it does. Yeah, definitely. And hopefully I'm when things start to get a little bit more normal. You can go back to lecturing cpW. Yes. I'd love that. Right. Well, I suppose this leads us on to like the next section where I'm curious about what actually ensemble offspring itself. And seeing as it were those the seeds of the beginning of the spring ensemble, which is now the ensemble offspring. Yeah.

Victoria Pham

Has it changed drastically over the last 25 years?

Claire Edwardes

Well I mean, yes. Because if you think about how those ensembles start, and we know many of those ensembles that have come out of the corner, of course, you know, they come a little bit out of need for the composers to have their music performed. And that's exactly how our ensemble started. You know, it was really so Damian and Matt could have their final year recitals performed by musicians who wanted to be doing it. And so he could have just ended the way most of those groups end. And I guess the big difference was that Damien is a pretty amazing and special person. And he obviously decided that he wanted to keep this group going. He he wanted to have this week, it was pretty much a collective, you know, like people would come and go, I went to Europe. Other people left. It was the most random. It was like a cpW group in the beginning, males like two saxophones, two trombones, two percussionists two pianos, like it was really weird combination. But it's really thanks to Damien and I guess the fact that enough people hung around to to play and stay but you know, we had car rozman is our current Prior in the beginning, and he's now in music for break in Cologne and Mark noop used to play with us. And he's an amazing pianist in London, as you might know. So, you know, we've had obviously different people play with us over the years. But it really solidified more into the direction that we've gone in, in the last kind of 10 years when I came back from Holland. And I said to Damien, do you want to hand like I knew I wanted to start my own group. But it just seemed crazy. Why would I start a group to rival the group that I was already in, that Damien had kept going? So I said, You know, I raise I'll help you. I know, it's really hard work. So that's what happened. And we became co artistic directors. And then obviously, in 2015, Damien, stepped back to focus on the con and his own composition. And, yeah, it's just, it was scary when Damien stepped down, because our model had always been like the composer and the performer who, who led the group together. And I have so much respect for Damien. So when he wasn't there, to sort of bounce ideas off, it felt really lonely, and it felt risky. And it was hard. But, you know, in that time, it's six years, and that's also when my marriage broke down. So it's, it's been a time of kind of finding myself, finding strength, realising what I'm capable of, also, you know, collaborating, so talking to lots of people, and, and making sure that I'm always Yeah, getting feedback, and like, being a better person, being a better artistic director, being a better, you know, leader in the rehearsal room, and also being a better boss, without, without employees, because no one teaches you how to manage three or four staff members. And that's been really confronting, and really hard, you know, I have to do performance reviews, and I have to, we have to adhere to KPIs and all those kinds of things. And, you know, I don't love it. But I guess what I've realised is, it's just part of the deal. Like, I have to, I have to do it. So I may as well do it as well as I can. And it's been a really great learning process.

Victoria Pham

How have you kept that sense of collaboration in throughout the company and how it runs?

Claire Edwardes

I don't know if the musicians would say, I mean, I'm sure they would, I'm very lucky in the core members that we have. There, we are all very good friends. And I think that's kind of a real linchpin to why it works. If we weren't also close, I think it would be hard, especially during these COVID times, but we all love the music that we play, I feel like they they know that their careers have sort of blossomed more into kind of new music, through the last kind of five to 10 years of really doing more with ensemble offspring, and they're all soloists in their own right, as well. And they're amazing musicians, and just beautiful people, and they trust me as well. So they know that we all have similar musical tastes and, and it's kind of, yeah, we review every concert through a creative community process with the whole group afterwards. So we do a reflection process. And it's it's hard kind of getting their feedback sometimes. But it's very important for the, you know, making sure we always do things better, and it's good. Like, I feel like it works at the moment. And if we could do concerts, it would be even better. Have you had to shift everything into a digital sphere? Yeah, but I mean, because no one's really allowed to play together. We were not really allowed to play together, because it's a pretty extreme lockdown at the moment. So I've been doing this Instagram Live kind of chat every Thursday night. And we've been where we were about to launch a kind of digital platform. But we've just got to wait a little bit till we can actually make music with a couple of people. It's a bit tricky. Yeah,

Victoria Pham

it's tricky. And it's difficult trying to do I know there's an app everyone was using in the first round. I can't remember what it's called anymore. acapella, I think, where everyone was trying to play in their individual homes and sync it up to this app. It's a it's a different sensation, not having all the musicians in one room reacting to each other and reacting to it then reacting to each other through the screen.

Claire Edwardes

Yeah. But it is I have to say we differ in our Borya for our first nations composer programme, which were going ahead with Jessica Wells was amazing. She's She's been, we would send him recordings to like a click track or a piano part that she recorded. And then by the time I did mine, I could hear everyone else's parts in my headphones. And it was it was surprisingly satisfying, much better than playing the part by yourself. Yeah, it sounds like okay, it's sort of does the job showing the composer's how it sounds? So?

Victoria Pham

Yes. And it's a way better than MIDI? I mean, yeah. Which is the only other aid you have when you're riding by yourself? Yeah, exactly. I should mention, actually, when I was a student, and actually when I was growing up, before I decided that I would see music for a career, ensemble offspring was the one ensemble in Sydney that made new music feel real. Because other than that, when we were studying new music as a high school student, it only really happened when we did the HSC course. And we had to learn about 25 years of Australian music, and on some offspring was performing in the in the West and across the CBD at that point, and that was my memory of music being actually tangible.

Claire Edwardes

yeah, well, there's a lack of that in Sydney, obviously, I mean, there should be more than just us. And, you know, we also can't play this, like, I've just been watching the Darmstadt on demand programmes and being reminded of how how, like, I don't know how to say this really, without sounding derogatory to Australian audiences. And I don't mean it this way at all. But you know, that there's, there's a certain kind

of limit to what people kind of will really listen to in Australia, still, I think, compared to cut the most cutting edge, kind of like German festival that has always done that. So of course, it's not going to be the same, you know, people don't have the same experience of listening to music. But yeah, that, yeah, I wish there was a broader spectrum in our city of groups like ours, who did, that's the more extreme stuff, and the more the more, you know, whatever stuff but but it's, I feel a little bit like, because we're the only funded ones. And we have been going for so long. And, you know, hopefully people recognise that as, you know, having an excellent standard in performance as well, that there isn't that much more space for more than us. And it seems kind of insane. It's like match law much said to me, actually, you know, the antique store always does better if it's on a street with lots of other antique stores, you know, you don't want the antique stores really spread out you want to go and just check out the antique stores. And I feel like Sydney does not really have antique stores in a row. Melbourne kind of does and London definitely does. But um, yeah, Sydney, New South Wales has not really been the greatest supporter of contemporary music over the last kind of 10 to 15 years. And and I shouldn't say anything bad about the New South Wales Government, because they have supported us. But I do think there's definitely an appetite for more than just what we provide. But I'm glad we're still able to do it.

Victoria Pham

Yeah. Yes. Why I hope that that kind of environment changes because the I always associated my own city in New South Wales with a bit more of a conservative leaning, in terms of contemporary music making. Suppose we have, we have, you know, the Opera House, which is, I suppose, for some reason has turned into a very conservative traditional space because it houses the opera and the orchestra, and they are less likely to play contemporary music.

Claire Edwardes

We have carriageworks, which is great. Because carriageworks was run by an arts an art curator for so many years. It hasn't. I mean, carriageworks has never really been a music space it it happens to be a music space, sometimes, but they don't even have a piano. So you know, it's you're right in a way that I think venues are part of the issue, as well as real estate being very expensive, making venues hard to hire making it harder for younger groups to keep going, you know, and keep presenting concerts because it's just bloody expensive, you know?

Victoria Pham

How did you find all the kind of weird and wacky venues across Sydney because I just remember going to ensemble springs I would go to venues sometimes I've never even heard of and my first one was one I think you did a performance in various tents underneath.

Claire Edwardes

Oh, noise Yeah. Oh, my God. That's that was crazy. That was Damien's Big Show. And yeah, we Damian bought all those tents and we did that little, the little like one on one performances. And then there was the main show, in that that was the Lower Town Hall and The funny story about that which I don't think you were there that night, because you would remember, the fire alarm went off during one of the show. If we were in the main body of the town hall, you wouldn't have heard it, apparently. But it was just because the Lower Town Hall is sort of like, alarmed, like, it's a service kind of area over who was so loud, and we all had to go out onto the street in the middle of the concert with the whole audience. Were all in our like costumes, and oh, my God, it was pretty like you never forget that. And we were so scared by it. We were so scared by it, that we've never performed at the Lower Town Hall, again, because we're

just too worried about the fire alarms going on. But yeah, Damian was great at finding alternative venues. And in a way, we had to do it because there were no other options. You know, like, we were the first group who played in the studio when opened at the Opera House, it reopened and they were the studio were amazingly supportive of us. And that was really important, I think, for our for also being taken seriously in a in a kind of funding situation. So that was awesome. But then the studio, of course, couldn't make any money by supporting new music. And so it turned into more of a cabaret venue. And so we weren't able to play in the studio anymore. And now we play in the audition room if we play in the Opera House, because we can't afford it. And so, yeah, then again, we were forced back to looking at, you know, churches in Paddington and other you know, City of Sydney spaces or just, I guess it's just, you're just looking for places to play. And you just, you just find cool places, and most of them don't, you know, places that you might have seen us play 10 years ago, we don't tend to use now because maybe they have a different owner. And they're not, you know, they're not open to housing concerts anymore. And Sydney is a bit fickle like that. So it does make it hard to find venues.

Victoria Pham

Do you have any advice for any young musicians or ensembles looking for spaces in Australia?

Claire Edwardes

It's tricky. We have a bit of a list. And I should make it public. Because it's quite hard to sort of you feel like every time you need to find a venue, you like racking your brains from scratch again. And that's not a great thing. So I will try and share the list on our ensemble, our spring website. That's the Sydney venues. We use a great space in, in darlinghurst, good East Sydney community Art Centre, which is where we do hatched Academy. And yeah, we love it at that venue. It's more of a dance venue and you can't have a piano. Because it's sort of a sprung floor, I think. But it's beautiful, because it's got windows on either side. And the last two years that we've been there. Actually, I think last year, it was COVID. There was we had to shut down early because of COVID, the Northern Beaches outbreak and then a year before it was the bushfires. And we were sort of like stuck in there with smoke surrounding us not being able to see the cathedral or the city. And so we've got pretty interesting memories of being in that space. But it's an awesome space. run by Brand X.

Victoria Pham

Oh, great. I should check it out. Actually, I don't know that many spaces it slightly disconnected with Sydney recently.

Claire Edwardes

Well, I really need to know spaces in Sydney when you're living in London.

For our first intermission is from Claire's 2017 album 'Clairaudient' and is a performance of Steve Reich's work 'Vermont Counterpoint' on vibraphone.

Victoria Pham

~~It's true, maybe one day when I returned.~~ Well, you mentioned hatched Academy and before you mentioned the narrow barrier at First Nations programme that ensemble offspring is running. I was wondering how all of these things came to be because not only do you have those two programmes, one for commissioning and wonderful education or training for emerging young artists, but you're also a key change ambassador, the ensemble offspring is a key chain ambassador. And you have quite a strong record in terms of your commitment to commissioning new Australian music. How was that all happened? And how do you manage all these different streams of pushing music forward?

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, I mean, it's To be honest, it's probably a few too many streams that we try and do on the actual kind of skeleton staffing and, and funding that we have. But I think Damien would agree and and I definitely feel that you know, who's going to champion new music if it's not the new music ensemble in that city, and you know, we're lucky to have this position. And when we got more into private philanthropy, which is only really in the last 10 years, and it's something very much that we're still working on and you know, trying to get people on the ride we've but of course what most people like the the being associated with is the creation of new music. And so we, I think we, it's fair to say we commission probably more than, you know, many new music ensembles in the world. And it's a lot of music within our programme to premiere, because we do commission so much. But it's, I just think it's so important because these composers, they don't have so many outlets in Australia have groups like ours, who are just willing to work out their pieces and give feedback and, and be really honest, and let them basically have carte blanche in relation to their aesthetic directions and what they want to do musically. And so, you know, especially through hatch Academy, that was our way of providing that for emerging composers at that period where you sort of like finished at uni, and you don't really know, how am I going to make a career of these? How am I going to make a living? You know, is this a viable thing. And I think, you know, it's good for us as well, because it keeps us as we get older, let's be honest, in contact with younger musicians, what they're doing, what they care about all those things, and you know, it's a two way stream. So no, arborea is exactly the same. It's it's not just the the composers and the First Nations artists who are benefiting from being able to work with us, it's more, I think it's more that we get to understand Aboriginal culture more deeply through really getting to know those, those people, or those musicians and those those artists, and if we didn't have, if we didn't have that programme, which we've now been involved with, for five years, I feel like my network of Aboriginal kind of friends and collaborators, and an artist would be still so small, actually. And so through that programme, we've all gotten to meet these amazing, inspiring, broad range of people, all different ages, all different backgrounds, and we have so much to learn from them, you know, just even if you're going to talk in relation to how to how to articulate the cultural differences and how to navigate that, you know, it's not easy. And I think the great thing about what's been happening in Australia in the last, you know, three years, with more orchestras doing rap plans, and we had, we had started a rap plan, which is a Reconciliation Action Plan. About four years ago, and now lots of people are doing it, and it's, it's part of this journey of really committing to working on the issues. And yeah, I think it's definitely there's change happening in Australia at the moment, and it's, it's happening quite fast. And that's scary. And I think we have to make sure it happens at a speed where it can happen properly, you know, where it's not just ticking boxes and, and yeah, not making real change, you know, I, I think that real change can come and it will take time, but with the orchestra is getting on board and even, you know, orchestras commissioning acknowledgments of country songs, and, you know, they these things, they're big, and, and I think it's happening right now. And it's an exciting place to be, it's also a scary place to be because it's much easier to just stay, that's too hard. And, and we're not going to go there because it's just too hard and it's too risky, and I could offend people. And we've learned so much and I'm really, really glad that

we've had the opportunity to be involved in this programme with the Australian Music Centre and Australian National University. So yeah, we're very fortunate to be involved in this programme.

Victoria Pham

And so much incredible music has come out of that programme, an incredible Honestly, I don't think I would have been in contact with had it not been for the programme and getting to, to hear about them and watch their music develop over the programme.

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, and hopefully there are, you know, there are other programmes, similar but different. Coming up in Melbourne, we've deputation and all around the country, I'd say and Darwin, there's great stuff happening. So it's definitely not just our collaboration through narrow Boria, but I think that's what I said before, I guess it's like when everyone starts doing it together, then that's when you get this surge of kind of change and creativity and exciting things happen. So we're right in the middle of of it at the moment, and I think it'll be Yeah, it's an exciting time to be here. Writing and making music?

Victoria Pham

Well, actually, you've just answered my next question. Ask them how we could make structural and non tokenistic change in the industry. And I suppose perhaps I could kind of she's all that into specifically the key change ambassador, that ensemble offspring has done a lot of the commentary or maybe I suppose the criticism I hear from people, when I talk generally about diversity, and when they think about female composers, they're just saying, Well, I mean, why can't we just programme music? That's good. And it doesn't have to be written by a woman, then it feels like we're just taking off boxes. And I suppose I'm getting tired now, because I don't know how to find that statement. So how do you go about that,

Claire Edwardes

that's a load of crap. When people say that, it just, it's just like, it's usually guys who say, let's be honest, and it's usually people who haven't really thought about the issue and why it is how it is now. And if you, you know, there's obviously lots of amazing platforms now, like, done women in music and key change. And then, and a lot of them are out of the UK, actually. And this, this woman who just made a map with composes female composers from around the world on it from the last 500 years or something. So there's a lot of people sort of, I guess, doing the work now to sort of show why this is necessary. So. And for me, the simple answer is, if the role models weren't there before, then they have to be made now. And if they're being made now for the first time, then that's why you need quotas. That's why you need to make systemic change, you need quotas, like it, I'm very, very sure of that. Because, and that's what key change is about, actually, it's just simple quarters on on not just programming, of course, but makeup of an orchestra, makeup of a band, boards, anything in the arts. And I do think I mean, if you look at boards, that's another great example, you know, boards traditionally have been male dominated, because that's how business has traditionally been run. And if you look at the odds, then arts boards are also male dominated. But why? You know, the answer isn't business. And yes, in Australia, at least, it feels a lot like the government's trying to make it look like business, which I don't think we are, but anyway, and so of course, it should be equal, you like genders on boards to get to get the say, to get, you know, all those things there are the women are there. So so it's just, it's as simple as that make the quota, do the thing. You know, we've come with composition, I feel same. The female composers are there, were playing music by living composers, they're all there, make the quota, do the thing. Like it's that simple. And so I think, I think people are scared, you know, especially orchestras, and I get why orchestras are scared because they have other music

that they also have to programme. But I do, the more I see, the work that's being done in finding, say lost voices of female composers from from older times, or that year is, the more I think it is going to be possible over time to find those voices that have been lost and, and champion them in that more classical tradition of sounding music. And then obviously, there's no excuse with living composers. So they need to do that too. And again, I feel like the UK is leading the way through the OIC, the orchestra's programming of new music and gender equity. It's amazing to see. And I just feel like, I'm so sick of having the conversation because like you say, there is really no answer. You just do it. That's my pretty much my motto in life is do it, then it's done. That's how I do everything. Like it sounds really stupid. But you know, you don't procrastinate. You don't go, I'm scared of change. Oh, I bet I like things had out. You just do it. And then it's done. And it will be done quickly. And then we can move on to First Nations voices, more diverse cultural voices, you know, all those things that are important. The female thing should be a given by now. You know, we've been doing it for five years. Let's let's move on now.

Victoria Pham

I agree. And sometimes the only thing I can say is if you're listening to a piece of music, new piece of music, you can't tell the gender of the person who wrote it. That's not possible.

Claire Edwardes

Yeah, no. It's still music. And and it's and it's good music. Sorry, but that argument of Oh, well, we should just programme good music. Yes, it is good music, but you might not have thought of it in the first place if you hadn't forced yourself to make a quota because you're so used to not thinking about it. That that's Why I think we need quotas, because to get even asked in 2017, when we programmed a whole series of female composers, for me, that was amazing because we the reason why Damien and I did that was because we looked at our programming over the last kind of 15 years, and we were like, Oh my god, it's mostly dude's like, it just is. And, and, you know, there's a reason for that. It's great music, Philip Glass, Steve rush, you know? Xenakis, it's music that needs to be played. But there's also Saariaho and and took chin and and if you programme them, you know, equitably, then that's the starting point. And then if you're commissioning and programming of younger composers equitable, then, you know, then it's done. But it was something that we had to do consciously in the beginning, too. So that's, that's how I know it works. Because now now it just happens.

Victoria Pham

And do you find that happens beyond on somewhat offspring as well with either the students that you've taught or with yourself when you're judging what to play as a soloist?

Claire Edwardes

So that's an interesting question, because I did have this. I don't know if we have time. But I had this kind of like epiphany. Well, it was a bad epiphany. It was like, three years ago, I got asked to play at music on Main in Vancouver to be do a residency there. And David Pei, who's the artistic director, asked me to, you know, send him some solo programmes. And I said, Okay, sure. And, of course, I wanted to play kind of things that I thought were classics, and it was mostly male composers on the list. And he said, Oh, you know, we're really trying for gender equity. So if you could include a few more females, and I just sort of realised looking at my list as well that in my repertoire, I just did not have enough pieces by female composers. And then, gradually over the last kind of three years, I've been lucky enough to work as one of the soloists in the composing women programme at the con. So I had all those great composers,

including Im, Mason's two, who've written me quite a few solo pieces over the last three years. So that's been wonderful. And then more recently, I got some money from the Australia Council for my rhythms of change project, which was to commission about eight Australian composers to write new works for me, female composers, which I want it to be aimed more at sort of secondary and tertiary level for this very reason that students can't change their their habit of programming unless they know that there's good music out there by female composers. And so this is my big, kind of, yeah, the thing I'm on about at the moment, I'm actually doing doing classes at conservatories around Australia on zoom, because I can't go there presenting on this new music that I've just commissioned and recorded. And kind of explaining also through my female composition list, which I just collated during lockdown. explaining why it is so important that they that they do think about this in their programming and that they do familiarise themselves with with this new music. I do I think it's really important.

For our second intermission is something quite special. Many thanks to Claire, this track are a sneak peek excerpt from Claire's upcoming album 'Rhythm of Change' that has yet to be released. The following peek is from Claire's performance of Ella Macen's work 'Falling Embers.'

Victoria Pham

And would you say that's one of the essential things that we could do in our attempts to kind of modernise classical music?

Claire Edwardes

I just listened to your conversation with Jessica caught us and I was very Yeah, go she's she's she articulated it very well, I thought. And her her take was more from the orchestral kind of perspective, I guess. And and it is tricky. Because, because in a way, it's how do I say this, like what she was saying, I think was really visionary. Because there are so few people in orchestral music sphere, who are as open minded as her whereas I run a new music ensemble, this is what we do. So it's a bit cheating for me to sort of say that I I know what the future is, because I'm not running an orchestra. I'm not conducting an orchestra. I'm not. I'm not wedded to that tradition, and therefore not the patrons who who expect that tradition. And I think that is part of the issue. And I think what orchestras need to do is not assume what their audience wants and don't want. And they also have to like what the BBC have been doing in Australia, where they've been programming much better gender equity and also First Nations content. And so they're adhering to quoters rather than only worrying about what the audience wants to hear. Because once they hear it a lot, they're not even going to remember what it was that they wanted to hear. So if you pander to what you assume that they want, then I think that's where you get into trouble. And I think that's what a lot of marketing departments of orchestras are still doing. And I just think it's totally insane that There aren't more people working for those big organisations who are just like, yeah, let's think out the box outside the box. It's so easy. This is what needs to happen. Because it is about the marketing really, isn't it? It is what it is. I mean, the whole world is about the marketing. So if you think if music was if classical, I hate the word classical, but if classical music was marketed in a smarter way, then then we'd all be fine. You know? Yes, some some people might walk out that the guy that happens all the time in mainland Europe. And that's apparently what in Darmstadt people still boo apparently. And that's kind of

the point of it. So I think we need more of this. We need more interaction, we need more, more excitement, more real real, you know, feelings about music, not just this kind of safe way of programming.

Victoria Pham

Yeah, I definitely agree. And you mentioned the word classical, what could we just do without it? Do you think art music or just plain out music?

Claire Edwardes

It's so tricky, you know, and I, you can imagine how much time I've spent thinking about this, because of course, we have to market what we do as well. And so, and I remember when the music awards were rebranded in Australia to beat up Music Awards. And, and I remember thinking it, I like it, but it doesn't at all describe how the music sounds right. Which, in a way classical does, because people have a pretty strong association with what they think is classical, which is probably a very good reason to get rid of the word classical, if we could. And then I was thinking, how do you just grab the musicians who who play classical in inverted commas, instruments, let's call them orchestral instruments. And they spend like 20 years of their life getting to be amazing at that instrument, versus say, a singer songwriter who can just play the guitar and it serves as a kind of, you know, a means to an end for them to for their poetry to be amazing song and they're accompanying themselves a bit. It's much it's different in terms of their skill level of on that instrument. How do you describe that? And I often have an issue with Yeah, calling myself classical percussionist, for example. Yes, I was trained through a classical kind of trajectory, I guess. But that's not to say I play classical music, though. Yes, I do think we definitely need to do away with that word, but I still don't know of a good replacement for it. And that's the issue.

Victoria Pham

I'll do I think the word classical kind of conjures up that image of, you know, people in tails and suits playing.

Claire Edwardes

yeah, the wigs as well, like from like Highlands day with like, the bits on the side. Like, I think everyone has that imagery. And that's why it needs to be done away with, but um, I would love a word that conjured up, or any words that describe music that conjures up, how it actually sounds, how it makes you feel. And we tend to describe things as I like to describe it as living breathing new music, so music by living composers that's alive now. And as Jessica said, when you spoke to her, all music was, you know, premiere in its day, or music was risky, or cutting edge in its day. And I think it's really important to remember that. And like she said, not to keep it in a glass cabinet, you know, keep it alive, which is why this whole historically informed kind of trend of light has been so great, because it is this kind of keeping, keeping it alive, keeping it fresh. And I think the more we can have that, the better. You know, we need we need all music. And, and we also need the old stuff, like Jessica said, to sort of reference the new and know how to listen to the new, but I think I wrote an article for Limelight about the fear of the unknown in music, because I think there is a big fear of the unknown and and why is it that you can't, that that that art doesn't have that same fear? Obviously, it's because you can walk away. Like that's a big one, you can't walk, you know, you can, but not as easily Can you leave, leave a concert hall or lever leave a recital centre. So it's much more confronting for people and, and I like to compare it to, you know, having a fear of sharks or skydiving or whatever, it's, it's kind of a similar thing. It's not really based on anything. You know, really, it's not really based on anything you've ever experienced or had happened to you. So I think I think the more that we can really talk about it from a sense of like, you know, you're open minded about these

things. Be open minded about music as well be be ready To let the music wash over you let it let it make you feel things, it doesn't have to be a cerebral experience, you don't have to analyse it, you don't have to understand that. That's what I think is so exciting about it. It's, it can be anything.

Victoria Pham

I think it was like ensembles like ensemble offspring, the work you're doing and various other ones in Sydney and across Australia, perhaps there's a chance to make a kind of more sustainable music culture where we're more inviting of new ideas and new people to hear things, rather than I often find talking to people who are afraid of attending classical music concerts, that they're expected to already know, a lot of information about what they're going to experience. So I think the model of inviting people, as you say, to living breathing concerts is one way to kind of ease that anxiety about leaving, or you're aware of classical music and its traditional expect presented in a casual way and talk a lot and, and make it make it fun

Claire Edwardes

I mean, I that's my big thing. I have fun when I play. So why shouldn't the audience have fun when they when they're experiencing it? And? And I think, I think it will, I think it's happening, you know, that people don't, don't don't think of classical music as this kind of like staid, scary, kind of old fashioned thing that Yeah, they have to know stuff about, I think contemporary music was a little bit marred in the kind of 70s and 80s by this, you know, the black skeevy sort of thing of being like very serious, and, you know, and you have to understand it, and there's lots of notes, and none of it is harmonic and, but I feel like it's very times of changing, like going through a very different kind of, kind of period of the norm in terms of the way things sound. And hopefully, we'll move on to a different way. And again, the soon enough, but I think the trend at the moment is hopefully one that we'll be able to bring in more people and, and be able to make people realise that it's about the experience. It's not so much about all the all the other old fashioned Kind of, yeah, extraneous things around concepts and what that means, because that's boring.

Victoria Pham

All that fluff. Yeah, this is an aside, but I was talking to another Sydney composer, just on Saturday, James hazels. Come shortly before he did perhaps Academy last year. Yes, he did. That's right. Yeah. And we were having a quick conversation about how to, again, talking about why contemporary art is this kind of different. They have a different level of engagement with the public and how they've gotten to that. And we thought, Oh, wait, artists have this, this thing where they do open studios where the public can go in or other artists and go in, they can see unfinished work, or look at work that isn't polished and maybe isn't great yet. And perhaps we could do something similar with music where composers or performance we do these kind of like open studios and trade ideas. So that again, we don't have a sense that everything needs to be perfectly polished all the time.

Claire Edwardes

It's, that's great. And you know what, you know, the Peggy Glanville Hicks house in Sydney. So that's like a residency that a composer get. So he and Aviva and Dean was there this year, but she's just had to go back to Melbourne because of the whole lockdown thing. But the last open, like what they try and sort of they suggests that the person who takes up the residency should sort of do an open house and in the past the people who've done it, who've done those, they've just present a little concerts with the piano and little bit interactive, but and maybe some interviews, but nothing quite like the concert the presentation

we experienced it a Weber's which was just that it was kind of like a workshop, where everyone was asked to sort of say what they thought and if they had any ideas, and it wasn't just musicians who were there. And it was really satisfying. It just felt like yes. that this could be a way forward. For for audience and musicians alike. No, like you say not not that thing of feeling like everything has to be kind of, you know, polished up, and maybe it wasn't actually ready, but you have to pretend it is good. That's the expectation. So I think I agree. I think there's definitely room for more of that sort of model. That would be cool.

Victoria Pham

I would show up to say anything, just to see how people are working and working together and create that communal space. Yeah, yeah. Well, I actually have one more question for you. Okay. And I'll start off with a quote from the article that you've mentioned, that you wrote earlier this month. And it's from the tagline in which you say, many people are intimidated by new music because of a lifetime of Sonic conditioning. And my question revolves around that idea, and what kind of advice you have for upcoming young musicians and composers or maybe not even upcoming musicians and composers, some established ones as to how we can To alleviate that pressure of Sonic conditioning?

Claire Edwardes

It's a tricky one. I mean, I think the answer is definitely not to pander to what they think audiences want. And I think composers like Amanda Cole, who've just been following their journey of, of, you know, quarter tonal and music for her whole life. It's, yeah, it's very much to be respected, I think because, because I think you never really benefit from trying to do what you think audiences want. So I think for sure, learning that learning the craft in terms of instrumentation, and even really like learning a craft in a kind of like being able to write fugues and being able to do things that are like traditional, and I think Australian composers are probably not taught those things nearly as much as in Europe, and on mainland Europe. And I know, in Belgium, for example, they really are. And I think it's like learning your scales in a way, like none of that stuff goes astray, when you're trying to deviate from tradition, because you've got all those skills is like your toolbox and then and then you're kind of like, Okay, I'm doing something else. And I think the structure structural, like getting getting a handle of kind of structural development and, and structuring works, which can come from analysis of lots of different types of music, you know, that's really important I find in relation to holding an audience's you know, focus on your work. And at the end of the day, that is really important. You know, you don't want to, you don't want to kind of dump your audience with some music and kind of go like, hey, guy, this is this is my music, like, take it on, leave it, I don't care if you like it or not. But at the same time, you have to do the thing that is true to your, your musical vision and your your aesthetic kind of taste or whatever it is that you want to do at that point in your your life and career. And I think it's really important to do a combination of both like you be true to yourself, be true to all the things that you believe in. But also, you have to think about the craft and you have to really hone it in you should never say, Oh, well, you know, I don't know if that's gonna work on that instrument, but we can just see and whatever, you know, ask a musician. It's so easy. Yes, I know, a lot of composers are quite shy, and they don't want to do that. And they're embarrassed. But um, you know, anyone in on some of the spring, you could ask, I mean, I get occasionally I'll get emails from like some random person in London or somewhere overseas, who seen that I'm doing this female competition listing this this girl, she just said, I never got I never got feedback from the people I wrote the piece for for the competition, would you be able to give me some feedback? I was like, Sure, I'll give you some feedback. I don't have much time. But I can open your PDF and give you some feedback. And I think I think most people, most performers are happy to do that. And I think we that's our that's our responsibility to composers. And I think I think it's not it. Like I said before, with the cpW thing, it's not a one way street,

it's not no longer is it performance serving composers. And all composers just dumping a score on a performance lap and saying, Here you go, here's the final score. It's, it's a process. It's this beautiful organic thing that that is often a very long, long term process. And it can be frustrating. And it's really hard work for both parties requires a lot of really open communication. But I think musically at the end of those processes, that the gold really can come and and I think that's why it is that I do what I do and why we do what we do with ensemble offspring. Because when that does happen, and when you see a composer growing over a period of time as well, it's it's a beautiful thing. And like someone like James, he could reach out to us and I think I said to Chloe Chong, a flute player the other day because we do this thing called hatch home Academy, where we do mentoring online. And I say to all of them, like, you know, you're in, you're in the family, now you're in the inner circle. And if you've done anything, unhatched you're in the inner circle, like, reach out. Like, if you need if you need advice, if you need help, if you need to ask a question, reach out where he for you, you know, and I think it's really important that people don't ever kind of go on the cloud is gonna be too busy for me or whoever, you know, most of us are happy to help and I yeah, I just I just think it has to be it has to be like that. It has to be this one big family and we're all just in it together because there's nothing else there's like nothing else to gain. There's certainly no money in it.

Victoria Pham

So you have to be doing it for the odd and for the social times and for all the other great stuff that comes out of it. It's also so much more fun to work that way to have a community to bounce ideas off. I hate the idea of being isolated.

Claire Edwardes

Well, yeah, and COVID certainly makes it hard, which was why it was great that we had the home Academy when we did it felt like really good timing.

Victoria Pham

That's so wonderful. I'm going to go check out all the things I may have missed from being afar. Yeah. Before and yeah, thank you so much for making the time to talk with me. I've learned so many things, and are going to definitely pop information about the prs key change and things like that, that some people may have not heard of, into into the description so everyone can get access to that. So thank you so much clear.

Claire Edwardes

Great. Thanks for having me, Vickie

Victoria Pham

Another thank you to Claire, and again access to her work, her upcoming album released and the resources we spoke about during the episode and information about Ensemble Offspring are available below. Thank you to everyone for listening and see you in a few weeks for the next one!

RESOURCES

Claire's Website: <https://www.claireedwardes.com/>

Limelight Claire's article: <https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/ensemble-offspring-embracing-the-new-and-unknown/?fbclid=IwAR1DJ91HVCmDLPb5TS0suIDUeBjbamt4wxRW4FCgYJOb01QpJvSScbU12FQ>

Claire's Resources for Composers: <https://www.claireedwardes.com/resourcesforcomposers>

Claire's Female Composition List: <https://www.claireedwardes.com/femalecompositionlist>

Ensemble Offspring: <https://ensembleoffspring.com/>

Keychange EU: <https://www.keychange.eu/>