

INTRODUCTION

Context is Everything: A Fiftieth-Issue Reflection on our Journal of Music Research *

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As a music historian, I am rather fixated on anniversaries. My own research has included a fiftieth anniversary history of Australia's Intersarsity Choral Festival Movement (1999), a fiftieth anniversary history of the Canberra Choral Society (2002), and a 150th anniversary history of Trinity College, the oldest of the residential colleges affiliated to the University of Melbourne (2022).¹ So, when I saw that this issue of *Context* was to be the fiftieth, I could not resist suggesting that this remarkable milestone be celebrated with an introductory essay.

Origin stories are a popular genre for fantasy and superhero fiction, and it seems right also to start at the beginning when discussing *Context*, for it is only through revisiting its genesis that we may find the reasons for its longevity and continued prominence on the Australian music research landscape. One important aspect that should be discussed at the outset is scope. The keen-eyed among you will have noticed that the sub-title of our publication refers not to musicology but simply to music. This was and is a purposeful choice, one that has

* On behalf of its many prior iterations, the current editorial committee wishes to acknowledge with gratitude Peter's remarkable twenty-six-year contribution to *Context*. For thirty-four of our fifty issues, in a range of capacities including reviewer, copyeditor, typesetter, and consultant, Peter has modelled a professionalism and rigour that has been an invaluable example for so many early-career scholars, and underscored the success of our journal to the present. [Ed.]

¹ Peter Campbell, *The Triumphs of Our Fleur-de-Lys* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2022).

been reviewed and debated by the committee on several occasions during my twenty-five-year involvement, always with the same result: in the small music research sector that exists in Australia, the broadest reach and widest definition of our subject will promote inclusivity and cooperation where elsewhere our field is splintered and scattered. Unlike in some countries, usually with larger pools of researchers, in Australia we rarely separate the historical musicologists from the analysts, the music educators from the therapists, or the composers from the performers. While each discipline might have its own journals internationally (and some nationally), *Context* was designed from the start to be a place where all would feel welcome to contribute and where a cross-fertilisation of ideas might flourish.

There was obviously some behind-the-scenes work before the first issue of the new journal went to press, but the editorial in that first issue, which appeared in the winter of 1991, gives us some context (yes, it is sometimes difficult to avoid that term):

The aim of *Context* is to provide a forum for the publication of material concerning all aspects of music—musicology, composition, therapy, education—and to encourage discussion of a broad range of issues. In this first issue there is a strong emphasis on twentieth-century music, with articles on Debussy, Tippett, Conyngham and Dadaism. Apart from two complete works by emerging composers and another composer's philosophical thoughts on the concept of music, the editors have included selections from Mary Finsterer's *Madam He*, which has been chosen to represent Australia at the 1991 I.S.C.M. Festival. The final paper deals with the contentious issue of labelling systems of tonal organisation in early music. The editors would like to encourage contributions from all over Melbourne and, indeed, Australia. Future issues of the journal will include reviews and letters alongside articles and compositions, and correspondence is most welcome.²

The editors were Faye Patton, Patricia Shaw, Gary Ekkel and Joerg Todzy, and the sub-title to that first issue was actually 'A Journal of Melbourne Music Postgraduates'. The articles were by Suzanne Robinson, Gary Ekkel, Thomas Reiner, Patricia Shaw, Martin Greet and Helen Kasztelan. Alongside Finsterer's composition sat musical scores by David Young and Joerg Todzy. The contents represented the work of current and recent PhD candidates, MMus students and later-year or honours BMus students. The final pages of the 50-page volume included a list of staff research interests and a full list of the postgraduate-student cohort of what was then called the 'School of Music', including their thesis or dissertation topics. It is clear, from the editorial and from the 'guidelines for intending contributors' on the final page, that this was seen as only the first issue of an ongoing journal.

Perhaps the thing that set *Context* apart from existing journals was that integration from the outset of academic musical discussion and music practice, chiefly through notated compositions, with only the performers and pedagogues missing from the first issue, though this was soon addressed. Trish Shaw undertook the layout, with assistance from Graeme Gerrard, and printing was subsidised by a grant from the School of Music, though there was a cover price of \$10 (\$7 for students) per issue and those interested were invited to subscribe for future issues.

One important feature of the journal was its imaginative cover, using an extract from a score by Barry Conyngham (whose works were the subject of one of the articles), designed by

² 'Editorial,' *Context*, 1 (Winter 1991): 2.

Ross Hazeldine at Red House, a Melbourne-based music publishing company founded in 1990, which also assisted *Context* with the layout of music examples. Hazeldine would continue to design a unique cover for each of the following 39 issues, ceasing only in 2014 when *Context* moved online. An archive of all the covers can be found on the website (<https://contextjournal.music.unimelb.edu.au/graphic-archive/>).

Among the other acknowledgements in the first issue is the statement that the ‘concept for the journal originated with Michael Christoforidis,’ then a PhD student undertaking a thesis on Manuel de Falla. Christoforidis recalls that there was a ‘very active and engaged postgraduate student community’ at the time, with lively discussions at the weekly postgraduate seminar, which included students from all areas of music research across the faculty. Personally, he was aware of the publication opportunities then available to postgraduate musicology students in Spain, as was John Griffiths, who was acting head of the Faculty of Music in 1990 and head in 1991 until the appointment of Warren Bebbington as Ormond Professor. So Christoforidis banded about a few ‘vague ideas’ with his fellow students during postgraduate seminars in 1990 and then proposed the concept to Griffiths, who eagerly supported it and backed it with faculty money.

One of those fellow students was Trish Shaw, who recalls the desire to ‘create a vehicle for postgraduate students to start publishing music research work, to get experience of the process before sending things to any of the main journals, and to have a publication to put on their CVs, funding applications, etc.’ Both Shaw and Ekkel lived at Ormond College, one of the residential colleges affiliated with the University of Melbourne, which had its own multi-disciplinary journal, *Ormond Papers*, that gave students a first experience of the process of preparing a paper for publication, from submission through review to copy-editing and proofreading. This was a model already employed by other faculties in the university including Law, where a student committee was in charge of the *Melbourne University Law Review*, founded in 1957, and in music faculties overseas, such as Columbia University where the graduate students founded *Current Musicology* in 1965. This is where Bebbington had seen the model in action, and he also lent his support from 1992 to the local version.

Context was to be similar to these existing models. It was specifically for music research but across all the disciplines of the postgraduate courses at Melbourne—musicology, music therapy, pedagogy and composition—and primarily, though not exclusively, emanating from Melbourne-based scholars. Its content was broadly defined to be of interest to the educated, classical-music public, hence it was open to book and CD reviews. Christoforidis recalls discussing the possibility of reviewing concerts and festivals but, with the expectation of releasing only two issues each year, this was not really viable, given the long lag between the event and the appearance of any review. CD reviews were also quickly dismissed, perhaps because of the difficulty of assessing the research component of both the recording and the review.

Christoforidis left Melbourne in March 1991 to undertake a year of PhD research in Spain, so he was not actually involved in the production of the first issue, but he does remember a number of preliminary meetings of interested students in the Tallis Wing, including one where possible names for the journal were tossed about. He thinks it was Joerg Todzy who suggested *Pragma* (‘thing’ or ‘reality’ in Greek). Shaw, Ekkel, Todzy and Faye Patton were left to follow the publication through, often meeting in Ekkel’s flat in Ormond College. The finally agreed-upon title for the new publication was *Context*, a pun on the CONservatorium, now neatly highlighted in the new logo designed by Casey Fitzpatrick and appearing in this issue for the

first time. The question of which submissions to accept in those early years was an easy one: there were only a few! Each editor took charge of one or two items for editing, and the initial layout as an A4 stapled booklet was chosen merely because it was the simplest and cheapest way of printing, though it was also a good format for musical scores.

The editorial committee was expanded for the second issue, produced at the end of 1991, to consist of ten members, now including Linda Ceff, Matthew Hindson, Vaughan McAlley, Ken Murray, Thomas Reiner and Suzanne Robinson. The content was heavily skewed toward composers and performers, with a lead article by Anne Boyd, the new professor of music at the University of Sydney, on Debussy and the gamelan. The first book reviews appear in issue 3 (Winter 1992), along with a research report from John Griffiths on 'Spanish connections at the School of Music,' and two letters to the editor in response (or, more accurately, in opposition) to the 'brief diatribe' in the previous issue on the state of modern composition, written by Ian Shanahan. Layout was taken over by McAlley for one issue after Shaw's departure from Melbourne (he was followed by Lawrence Harvey); Royston Gustavson and Ken Murray joined the committee in place of Patton and Ekkel, while Christoforidis became more involved after his return from Spain.

He recalls the work in the early years of fostering subscriptions and attempts to sell *Context* through the Carlton and Parkville newsagencies and at Readings bookshop in Lygon Street. Christoforidis and Murray set up a table during the 1992 Musicological Society of Australia (MSA) conference in Sydney, and tried to encourage contributions from interstate musicologists and musicology students (although he does not think many issues were sold that way). The following year, at a conference in Spain, he discussed *Context* with Michael Noone, then editor of *Musicology Australia*. Noone expressed his concern that there was not enough support, either from contributors or from readers, for a second musicology journal in Australia.

Nonetheless, they persisted. A business sub-committee was established, separating that work from the process of editing, and in 1994 Victoria Watts was engaged to do the layout. (She was probably the only person the committee knew who had any idea how to operate the complicated *QuarkXpress* software!) The faculty continued to support *Context* financially—though the committee did have to raise money by other means, including selling advertising, such as the full-page ad in issue 7 from Thomas' Music in Bourke Street, with details of no fewer than eight CDs of the music of John Cage (and another in issue 9 for the works of György Ligeti)! Martin Greet joined the committee, and Trish Shaw re-joined on her return from lecturing in Canberra. The faculty expanded funding from merely covering the printing to offering a small honorarium for the person (usually a research student) acting as co-ordinator of the editorial committee, recognising the significant time and organisation skill required.

Coinciding with the centenary of the Faculty of Music (and the associated conference at which every delegate was given a copy of *Context*), from issue 10 (Summer 1995), the journal became peer reviewed and a high-powered, thirteen-member Board of Advisors was appointed—a number of whom had participated in the centenary conference—to assist the committee with matters of policy and protocol. Qualified, external reviewers from all over Australia and sometimes overseas had to be found for all articles submitted, and this enabled committee members to network with established scholars and editors, and greatly improve their understanding of scholarly standards and conventions. Liz Kertesz took on the role of co-ordinator, and the longstanding commitment to the promotion of contemporary music was

enhanced by a focus on interviews with composers, sitting alongside the published musical scores. In fact, this had begun slightly earlier, with Newton Armstrong's work, first in issue 8 with an annotated conversation between Chris Dench and Chris Mann, and followed by an interview with Brian Ferneyhough in issue 9.

A change of format was introduced from issue 13 (Winter 1997), reducing the size from A4 to B5 (a more standard journal format) and exchanging staples for 'perfect' binding. The font and single-column format—with footnotes replacing endnotes—has been maintained since that time to the present. The wrap-around illustrated covers by Ross Hazeldine continued unchanged, except for the size, using graphic elements from scores or musical examples from each issue's submissions. Peter Campbell took over typesetting duties from issue 17 (Winter 1999) and will relinquish them after this fiftieth issue.

Context has assisted in promulgating (after peer review) selected research output of several conference events, including 'Music's Audience: Reading and Listening to Music in Australia and England, 1880–1930', celebrating the visit of Professor Stephen Banfield from the University of Birmingham in August 2000 (issue 19); the 24th national conference of the MSA held in Melbourne in April 2001 (issue 22, 'Nation and Identity'); and a symposium on choral music in Melbourne held to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society in 2003 (issue 25). Issue 26 (Spring 2003) was a themed issue devoted to popular music, for which Adrian Renzo was guest editor.

Being a biannual publication, *Context's* thirtieth issue also marked its fifteenth year of existence. While one double issue—15 & 16 in 1998—had been released previously owing to publication delays, by 2004 it was clear from the number and frequency of submissions and the time available for committee members to undertake the editing, that *Context* should move to being an annual publication, with a single, yearly volume being released at the end of each calendar year. Thus, issue 27 & 28 appeared at the end of 2004, and issue 29 & 30 at the end of 2005. That last-named issue was somewhat of a hybrid, featuring a regular articles section followed by a thematic section of papers on 'pre-composition', curated by composer Chris Dench. Issue 31 would then cover the whole of 2006 as the first annual issue. In the event, issue 31 turned out also to be a conference-based issue, with papers from a colloquium on music research held in Sydney during 2005 with the theme 'Renegotiating Musicology'. The volume was guest edited by Aaron Corn, Allan Marett and Paul Watt.

At just over 200 pages, issue 31 was the largest to that date, and contained only articles, without the usual additional elements of composer interviews, research reports and book reviews, but it would be surpassed by one final double issue, 35 & 36 covering 2010 and 2011, containing all the regular elements and being guest edited by Margaret Kartomi, Kay Dreyfus and Joel Crotty. While not themed as such, the articles in the volume were drawn mainly from writers with research connections to Monash University, where the editors had all been prominent scholars themselves. Issue 39 (2014) was the result of a symposium entitled 'Wagner and Us', held in 2013 in conjunction with Opera Australia's Melbourne production of the Ring Cycle. Kerry Murphy curated the articles for that volume.

In 2008, Australia's Copyright Agency Ltd (CAL), a not-for-profit organisation that facilitates the re-use of copyright materials, particularly for education institutions, asked the committee if it would be amenable to *Context* being loaded to RMIT Publishing's Informit database. The request noted that:

CAL, in partnership with RMIT Publishing and the indexing services of both the National Library of Australia and the Australian Council For Educational Research (ACER), is licensing online distribution of cleared journal content through the Informit platform. Informit's products and services provide a research portal for libraries and educational institutions ... The publisher will be required to provide RMIT directly with the final electronic files (PDF, Word, HTML) that are used for print publication. RMIT will then undertake all work preparing the journal for publication on e-Library, including the creation of detailed metadata and electronically indexing the full text of the journal content so it is more accessible through RMIT's custom-built search facility. Articles selected for the four RMIT full-text databases [including the *Australian Public Affairs Information Service* (APAIS)] will be scanned and indexed by the NLA and ACER and subscribers will then be able to access the PDFs of these articles. RMIT will use digital tracking software to monitor actual online subscriber access to your work and CAL will use this information to administer your payments.³

After several months of discussion in committee and checking with university legal services, it was agreed that signing with Informit could only be beneficial to the discoverability of the rich back-catalogue of research that had appeared in *Context*, particularly overseas. As readers had to pay for access through Informit, it was not felt that there would be any significant impact on *Context*'s own subscriptions, though the advent of full-text, searchable databases, combined with university budget cuts, would soon cause a decline in direct institutional and library subscribers. The administration of processing individual subscriptions and dealing with central university finance was also a drain on committee resources, so much so that in 2014 the faculty agreed to scrap subscriptions altogether and forgo the income in favour of moving the journal online, thus saving the printing and mailing costs, as well as staff time. Sue Cole worked tirelessly in the liaison processes for both these significant changes to *Context*'s working arrangements.

Instead of business administration (though that was useful experience in itself), members of the committee could hone editing and communication skills, make decisions and liaise with authors, often experienced, senior academics. Through this process, it was clear that one's own writing also improved; one became a more critical reader and a tougher critic of one's own work, hopefully enabling younger researchers to submit better-crafted and argued work to better journals. In describing the worth of *Context*, Christoforidis said:

While the landscape of academia (and publishing) is changing so radically, I think that *Context* serves a great function in introducing students to scholarly publication and editing, and as such making a significant contribution to early CVs and experience in honing scholarly modes of communication. The journal's longevity and open-access status make it an invaluable (and nationally/internationally recognised) forum for accessing Australian musicological research.⁴

Trish Shaw thinks that *Context* has 'encouraged many postgraduates to consider themselves early-career scholars, and to publish their first work earlier than they might have otherwise.' Even though *Context* has developed and maintained high scholarly and editorial standards, it is nonetheless somewhat easier for students to get a paper accepted through *Context*, where

³ Email, Rosanna Arciuli, CAL Membership Manager, to *Context*, 29 April 2008.

⁴ Email, Michael Christoforidis to Peter Campbell, 9 January 2025.

the editorial mechanism is supportive and guides them through the entire process. *Context* had also, she said, published a 'huge amount of research on niche topics that might struggle to be published elsewhere—such as music in Australia—including many new compositions, just like some of the best journals of the 19th and early 20th centuries.'⁵

Over the past thirty-five years, there have been some difficult periods for the journal, with small numbers of submissions, an overly busy committee, or a particularly troublesome submission. But there were equally many highlights, not the least of which is the long-lasting friendships established within the committee, despite its constant renewal and turnover. In 2019, *Context* released a special, extra issue, containing papers given originally at a Melbourne Conservatorium conference dedicated to postgraduate music research. Six of the papers made it through the review process to publication, and we are proud that *Context* is able to support early-career researchers in this way. Many an issue launch party, at a committee member's house or at the local pizza restaurant, was spent writing the call-for-papers for the next issue; such was the endless round of committee life.

The list of co-ordinators since Liz Kertesz includes Megan Pricor, Sue Cole, Jen Hill, Peter Campbell, Rachel Orzech, Tim Daly, Sarah Kirby, Madeline Roycroft and Ross Chapman. Support from the faculty and conservatorium management was always forthcoming, and we acknowledge especially the boundless encouragement and advice given by Kerry Murphy, nominally the staff contact-point for *Context* for most of its recent past. Michael Christoforidis and Linda Kouvaras, both themselves former committee members, were other staff members in constant demand as readers and sources of advice.

I finish with some statistics: hard evidence of the achievements over the past fifty issues. *Context* has published 251 articles, 30 original compositions, 28 interviews with composers or performers, 37 research reports and 163 book reviews, along with multiple thesis abstracts and registers of graduate research topics, three letters to the editor and two obituaries, a total of more than five hundred separate items. It think it is fair to say that *Context*, now fifty issues old and in no danger of stopping, has amply fulfilled its initial brief of being 'a forum for the publication of material concerning all aspects of music.' Surely it has succeeded far beyond this to become a mainstay of the Australian music research scene and a valuable, if not vital, training ground for young researchers in all fields of music.

About the Author

Peter Campbell completed his PhD at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 2003. He has published widely on aspects of Australian history, especially in relation to choirs and choral singing, and has been a member of the *Context* editorial committee since his arrival in Melbourne in 1999. This is his last issue.

⁵ Email, Trish Shaw to Peter Campbell, 12 December 2024.