

DECLASSIFY

Episode 2: The Waves – Audience and Programming Media

Guest: Stephen Adams

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SUMMARY

This week Declassify has invited a familiar voice from ABC Classic FM onto the episode – Stephen Adams. Stephen is a beloved voice on the radio waves having worked with ABC Classic FM since 2004. He has been instrumental in programming, commissioning and broadcasting Australian music and new music. He is also an inexhaustible composer and performer with a recently released album, who aside from all this work, also runs his own podcast 'New Waves,' This episode's conversation revolves around the nuances of media and institutional responsibilities relating to programming. How can statistically gradual progress in broadening programming choices – from radio production through to concert halls – chance what audiences wish to or would like to engage with? Is there room for and a desire for more diverse voices and new music on a wider platform within the classical music industry?

TRANSCRIPT

Victoria Pham (VP): Hello there and welcome back to Declassify for another week of questions and conversation. This episode I'd like to welcome a voice some of you might be familiar with and that voice belongs to Stephen Adams. Stephen has been working for ABC Classic FM since 2004, specialising in the broadcasting and programming, as well as production, of Australian Music and of New Music. He's also a well-known composer and performer, and I'm so glad that he's joining this episode. I'd like to welcome Stephen onto the podcast. Hey Stephen!

Stephen Adams (SA): Hi Vickie! Great to be here.

VP: Thanks for coming onto the ride. As I said in the intro you are also an experienced musician and performer, aside from your work in the ABC, so I thought it would be a good place to start and give us an understanding of your background, and how that all relates to your experience of new music, by actually creating it.

SA: Yeah well, I only became a radio and media person at the age of 40. So, for the previous 30 years or so, I made music myself and recorded a lot of it, and I recorded a lot of other people's as well, but it wasn't my plan for life to become a radio producer. It's one of those things, accidents that happen and so, it changed my view on how careers and lives unfold, to realise that something like that could happen at it was not at all something I was aiming or thinking about. So, that was a slightly circuitous answer, but coming back to the main nub of your question, I think I've always made music since I was a very small child. But the eye idea of new music as a category of culture, I guess, is something that sort of crept up on me in my mid to late teens. Sort of introduced to some living composers at some point in high school. I had my own band and I was also involved in drama and was making music for these children pantomime and things, and then at a certain point, I had the opportunity to put in for this school's composer workshop and I got to write this piece of music for these members of this – these four musicians– members of the Seymour Group. Ah this is back in 1981. They were quite important in Sydney through the 70s and 80s, really into the 90s and even into the 2000s, as champions of new music and really this experience and meeting Anne Boyd in person and

Nigel Butterly in person, and Trevor Pearce and Richard Toop. Suddenly, this world kind of exploded and I went “Oh, this is all happening now.”

Somehow that became something that I gravitated towards although I was very attached to playing in bands and all sorts of other musical activities that didn't quite fit into that cultural world. How does it affect what I do now or what I'm doing in radio? That's a really difficult question to answer.

The short answer is that I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now in radio if I hadn't been writing music and playing music for most of my life. So, I came into radio sideways into a position called the 'Australian Music Curator' at the time. It was a one-year contract, it was a one-time idea of the guy who was head of ABC Classic back then in 2004. And it was the idea to get someone in who was from outside the ABC who was involved in a grassroots way in contemporary art music, to try and cook up some initiative and do some things for a year. Actually, the brief was amazingly – either vague or sweeping depending on how you want to look at it – the network had just axed 6 months earlier two significant programs that I and a lot of people were really unhappy about. They had axed a thing called the 'Listening Room' which was hugely important for the development of radiophonic art and sound art in Australia. And they also axed another program called 'New Music Australia' which had been a kind of been an anchor point for contemporary classical music in Australia since the late 80s.

So, 6 months later I start at ABC Classic and my brief is along these lines, 'Ah, we've decided not to do specialist programming anymore and we want all our programmers and presenters to play new Australian music just as part of mixture of things just as part of everything else they do, and we want you to help make that happen. To be an internal diplomat, in some sense, though with no power or authority, and then externally we made a lot of people unhappy in the new music community, and we want you to go out and see what you can do ...

VP: to appease them?

SA: [laughs] They didn't use the word appease. But basically, you know, to see what you can do now in this space. And for some reason, this person seemed to think that the new music scene in Melbourne was particularly unhappy. So, the role I've been in since then, although it's sort of morphed and turned into another role and then became permanent after about another

2 and a half years after I started there, I've always felt like a bit of a foot in two worlds. Obviously, I'm there to work for the ABC, the ABC employs me and the ABC Classic is my specific employing context, I have a job to do for the network, but I've also always felt like an advocate inside the network for the new music world and experimental music world, and that's been something that's been very important for me. And that's had some moments where I've felt like we've been able to do some really great things, and then I've felt sad when there are other times where I haven't been able to do such great things.

VP: I've always wondered having had conversations with up and coming musicians as well as some more experienced musicians, that there is a tendency to lump new music together with the experimental arts. I've always wondered why occasionally the term experimental has become an umbrella term in which the new sits.

SA: Do you mean why do we all put all of it under experimental, or why do we put it all under new music?

VP: Under experimental.

SA: Yeah, I don't.

VP: Yeah, neither do I. [both laugh]

SA: In fact, I do use the word experimental music more loosely than I used to because in the end, there is a sense of kind of vernacular usage and how people use it. But I have been in many panels over the years, like panels trying to select the winner of Experimental Music category at the Art Music Awards and had arguments with people going "experimental isn't a style." Experimental is an activity, it's an approach, it's actually what you're doing – you have to be asking questions, you have to be doing something that is not simply a very accomplished reproduction of what you've done before or what someone else has done before. But I'm weakening on that a bit because although I still think that's "true" [in inverted commas], if you like it's a higher order truth, or if you like a cultural truth, that experimental music is a style or collection of styles. But it is quite distinct from what I would call classical concert music.

And there's some overlap, there's a little bit of overlap, because some of the practitioners or a subset of the practitioners that operate in both spheres. And they come together, why do I talk about them together? Because I guess within the house of the ABC and in various other cultural contexts, both of these musics are in some degree marginal, and both of them can be seen as a little bit intellectual, although I don't think that's their most glorious quality. Therefore, they end up in the same space in terms of advocacy, or in terms of opportunity, or in terms of some of the people are engaged with it.

VP: I've come down to the same conclusions as to why that they're often lumped together. And if I talk to anyone who's not from the classic music spheres, it kind of feels highly academic and experience for an audience. So, balancing this side of your experience with your work with the ABC, which is audience-oriented in a different way than some of these experimental gigs, it audience then a consideration when you're working on a new piece or programming? Specifically thinking about the audience and how it's different between compositional work and at the ABC?

SA: That's interesting. I think one of these things that's helped me to manage and cope ok and at least do a reasonable job at the ABC, part of my background, I spent 15 years teaching English to migrants and refugees, and did quite a bit research of cross-cultural communication. I also had a formative experience at 20 living in Istanbul in Turkey and learning moderate Turkish and teaching there. And I think a lot of those experience were quite important to me in that I already thought that communication was important. So, I think even before I landed before the ABC, I already thought that communication was important. That doesn't mean that you necessarily ask what people want to hear, but that you ask 'is what I'm doing something that can make sense to the people I'm addressing it to?'

VP: So that there's greater clarity in how and why you communicate in a way that doesn't totally disengage or alienate some audiences?

SA: Yeah, and part of that is being clear about what your audience is. I have no problem whatsoever with people making music that may turn out to only be of interest to about 5 people or about 50 people or 300 people. I think it's a very valid thing to do. You can't really put hierarchies of value in this regard, but it's a perfectly valid thing to do. What can be a little bit confusing and frustrating sometimes looking on it happening, is people writing music that's

clearly addressed to quite a ... that takes a lot for granted about people's frameworks and people's understanding in order to be able to appreciate it or to connect with it, or to understand what the composers, or the performers or the creators are doing. And then, those people feel pissed off that it's not going to be played on high rotation radio or that it's not going to be played by a symphony orchestra which kind of has to have an audience of a few thousand people in order to be viable. So, I think that there's a realism thing, I mean, I think on the other hand that public institutions that massively well-funded or at least, in a lot of cases they're not massively well-funded, but they are relatively well-funded, do still have a responsibility and stretch out, if you will, to find ways of addressing and interacting with and presenting things that go beyond what's easy and to not only do what always hits the biggest audience target. It's a complex landscape.

And creative artists need to be a little honest, I think, about who it is they're actually addressing in their music. And not to necessarily be pissed off if they're not reaching audiences of tens and thousands and not being picked up by certain kinds of opportunities if the music their writing is so highly specialised and so sub culturally narrow that it requires a very special and not common experience or knowledge base in order to connect with it. I think it's sort of a tension there, like for someone like me. I certainly am interested in through something like New Waves Podcast and recently New Music Up Late Program, in those contexts which sort of say we're doing something extensively new and what we're doing might be unfamiliar, but you're still reaching towards making a diverse range of things that might be challenging and might be not accessed by a lot of people. Trying to find the way in for a wider listenership, trying to think laterally about what the musical experience is and how to translate that, or try to take something that might be seen as quite intellectual, try to connect to what does it mean? Or what does it mean in terms of the kinds of imagery and spaces, just finding other ways to get a hook into that. So, I mean, it's lazy not to try to try and do that, but you also need context that is at least partly an invitation for the audience rather than necessarily trying to do a 'gotcha' thing with them, you know, like its creeping up from behind at quarter-past-six after the news in the evening as they're driving home and suddenly hitting them with a barrage of something they can't decipher readily and don't have the context for.

VP: So, do you think in terms for the radio and bigger live organisations, like orchestras, that they have to find a way introducing the audience piece? Like the practice in some orchestral or

ensemble programming they use the companion piece method of pairing something new like a commission or programming an unusual piece alongside a standard.

SA: Well, that's certainly one way to deal with things, it is that thing of thinking about the audience you are addressing, who are you talking to culturally or musically or verbally. Doing your best to present what you're presenting in a way that gives that listener a way in, that gives them a reasonable chance of enjoying it and making sense of it. I think that's really important.

In the case of orchestras and programming and things, I guess it's up to them in terms of what's going to better as a financial model, one of the things orchestras used to do, and do far less today, at least as it seems today in Australia, is have these kind of dedicated new music spaces. So they would put a certain amount of new music into their events into their programming and then they would create these other events, sometimes in the nature of a festival or a subseries, or various things, not always the full symphony orchestra, sometimes more of a chamber orchestra subset. One of the more recent versions of that, that didn't run for very long was the Sydney Symphony Carriageworks series in Sydney, and something that's been going on for longer has been the Melbourne Symphony Metropolis Series in Melbourne, so these kind of things, where you create a separate house and go "well, here, you're on a kind of adventure. Come with us, you trust us, we're this big organisation and let us take you on an adventure." And it's certainly true that for many audiences that the festival seems to be an environment where lots of people are willing to take bigger risks and expose themselves to experiences that in the course of their normal diet of general radio listening or attending symphony concerts, or whatever it is, they might be less willing to embrace, less willing to invest energy and take a chance with. So, that's one context.

I don't think there's any end to the answers to the questions of how you present new work, but I think it is partly the responsibility of certainly of public organisations that are publicly funded to keep thinking about that and to keep engaging with new music that is being made now. Where they set the boundary of that is a continual movable feast which is partly about what's going on in the culture, partly about politics and organisational culture. Does the house of ABC Classic, as it was 25 years ago was called ABC FM and at that time it included radio drama, poetry readings, the radio arts I referred to earlier as the Listening Room this kind of sound-art for radio, if you like. Media culture has changed a lot in the last 25 years, and it seems to be overwhelmingly the case that stations or broadcasters or entities of this sort have defined their

identity more narrowly. And they've gone from a model of appointment listening where you go, so at this point in the week or this point in the day you'll have this experience, but over here you might have this different and not quite related experience, to going this is, for example ABC Classic. And when you turn on the radio you will hear something that you immediately as Classical Music. It's a huge cultural change and we can think about why that has happened

VP: One of the questions that comes up a lot in conversation is, why should organisations like orchestras that require a certain amount of security in terms of the audience that they procure, why should they bother programming things actively to be diverse or new if they can already secure the audience they have now? At least for the next 50 years, they'll definitely have this audience if they keep playing these classical standards.

SA: That's a very good question isn't it. I have an opinion about that but I can't back it up with any studies, but I have observations that tend to support it but I can't be certain if I'm right. I think that even the most ostensibly conservative audiences need stretch experiences in order to refresh or keep alive their heartland, or their preferred content. So, in other words, to go to the symphony orchestras, if they were to more narrowly program the repertoire that they know that upwards of 90% of their audience loves, and to only program that repertoire all of the time, there is kind of a law of diminishing returns, where the beauty and pleasure of that music will start to recede a little bit, the whole thing is not quite so alive. To know you're alive you have to occasionally experience pain or at least discomfort.

VP: Like a shock to the system you mean?

SA: Yes, something that sharpens your awareness of what you're hearing and that if you're only hearing what you're hearing what you're expecting to hear that your mind and your sense become dull. So that's a possible argument. I think there are others like saying an artform that has no living practitioners in the sense of creating new work, how long will a society agree to fund something that's like that? Is there a tipping point where people say, this has nothing to do with us?

INTERMISSION I

VP: For our first musical intermission is some brand-new Australian music. What you're listening to is an excerpt from Stephen's most recent album release *Sunset inside the Listening Room*, from the track *Sunset Day Side*. You might even catch Stephen on flute.

Follows a 3:30 excerpt of the from Stephen's recent album release *Sunset inside the listening room* (2020), from the track 'Sunset Day Side.'

VP: So how about we take a look at how programming works for radio and the statistics in terms of the changing demographic for the ABC, because you get quite a good picture in terms of who's listening to classical music?

SA: Something interesting about ABC Classic in the last while into the programming policy. We're currently running at a million listeners a week, that is to say that there are a million people a week who tune into ABC Classic. Some of them are listening virtually all the time, or at least once a day, and some of them are tuning in once or twice a week, but there a million people who tune in every week. That's actually a rather good figure, and it's up somewhat over the last two or three years. Contrary to what many people expected about radio in the internet area, at this moment in time at least, the audience figures are going up. We are on a lot more platforms than we used to be so we are now accessible to a lot of those digital channels. But it's interesting that the overall listening figures are up. In the last 5 years, we've had a much more focused policy of increasing the amount of Australian composition on the network, increasing the amount of music by women on the network, and more recently increasing the amount of music by First Nations composers on the network. And we have done that. I mean, there's always been a desire to include Australian music, that's always been a target for the network but that's been a bit up and down over the 16 years I've been there. But in the last 5 years it's gone up from 9% to 15.2% in the last financial year. That's measure in minutes, not in pieces, so it's literally the amount of musical airtime taken by Australian composers as above 15%. In that same period of time, we've gone from the shockingly low 2. Something % of women composers back in 2015, I think it was 2.8% but it was under 3% at any rate. And we're now at 12% for the last financial year. And that's been a focus point of both recording works more music by women, seeking out recordings and encouraging partner organisations when they come to us with proposals and things to include women composers' in their programming.

So, there are a few different things pushing, and obviously there are a lot of other people out there in the world doing that as well, so there are a lot more recordings than there were five years ago from a lot of the traditional repertoire. People are digging up a lot of the Classical, Baroque and Romantic, and early 20th century women composers who existed most of whom, apart from a handful, most of us not really aware of.

New Music Up Late had a policy of commissioning towards increasing the amount of women composers on the program. We never reached 50%, and with new music that should have been possible and we were getting closer. But if you look at Classical Music as a whole, 50% is extremely aspirational and I don't know when that would happen, because we're dealing with the huge cultural imbalance in terms of access and support for women composers historically, and because so much of what we play is historical, it's going to be a slow process. But we're at 12% and we intend to keep growing it.

During that time, we've also gone from almost no Indigenous or First Nations composers. I mean, if you went five years back, I could name two First Nations composers whose music had appeared on the station; William Barton and Deborah Cheetham. The body of work that was available from either of those composers was relatively small, especially from Deborah as she was really emerging from being known primarily as a performer to kind of growing into her composer voice and it has grown enormously in the last while. But the other thing that has been happening in the last while is that there have been various individuals coming out of the woodwork and there are now a lot more First Nation composers and we've been keen to partner with organisations that are doing stuff in that space. So, to roll back a bit, we've gone from a devastatingly small percentage of First Nation composition to 0.5%... we've reached 0.5% percent. Um, it's terrible but it's an achievement nonetheless in terms of where we come from and we continue to work on that. In that time our audience has gone up.

VP: Do you think it's related to these changes in programming in the last few years?

SA: I don't know if it's related, I think that there are other factors at play. And it might be helping, and it's certainly not hurting because it is part of this sense that what you're hearing on the radio is a little more reflecting the world that you live in.

VP: I used to, when I still in high school, go to ABC Classic FM and that was how I would find new repertoire, especially music I hadn't heard of before. Because searching for it myself, especially as a teenager, I had no idea how to start and if I were to just search up "piano repertoire" you would just find a lot of Chopin and Bach and Rachmaninov. And then there was a lot of Australian Music being played on the airwaves, and it was often how I would discover and expand my own repertoire. I'm very glad that it's expanding in this way because I do think that there will probably be other musicians who will be doing what I was doing.

SA: That's it. And if you're hearing that music as part of your normal diet, and this is what we're trying to do in a sense. If you put more of that music into rotation or into spaces where it gets heard more than once, it doesn't just get played once and then forgotten which is one of the terrible things that has happened with a lot of contemporary classical culture over the years, and try to get the listeners more familiar with more composers, living composers and have a connection. Being able to think of a piece or a couple of pieces that they feel something about.

VP: The ideal would be, I would like to see Classical Music move beyond, kind of in the last 50 years, it shifted to this nostalgic experience of really big or recognisable pieces that we all may have memories of from the past. It would nice if we came back and could actively engage with more new music, especially now, for example in Australia we have such a diverse audience because we are so multicultural a country, and therefore, we have talented and diverse practitioners. It would be really vibrant and living to be able to pull this altogether.

SA: It's really interesting that you mention the diversity thing because it strikes me, obviously gender is one paradigm of diversity, the First Nations is one other significant one, but we are a very multicultural society. We hear some voices from non-English speaking backgrounds from the network and we hear music by some composers from a variety of other programs, but it's really interesting because what we're hearing is very much Western Classical music through a particular lens. So, I'm not sure but maybe that's something that might change in the next while. It's certainly something we've started talking about.

VP: Well this is something I've been thinking about and maybe it relates to the word 'classical' itself. Firstly, I need to acknowledge that the world of classical music we're talking about is one that is Western, so I'm not in any way advocating for us to erase Bach or Beethoven or Brahms because that's the history of this art form, however moving into this century we can

thinking about the word classical itself, because we're so multicultural a society, we no longer need to apply it only to western traditions. We have the luxury of accessing and hearing Indian classical traditions, Chinese classical traditions, First Nations traditions... so if we move to being able to encompass all these other traditions under the umbrella term of what is generically considered "classical" there may be some ways to collaborate or for wider representation on stage or in concert halls.

SA: Yes, it's hard to know what's going to happen on the concert hall, that's an interesting one. Just the fact of an institution like an orchestra, being an orchestra, and being defined in a certain way... will they play music from different musical traditions? I mean, there's a certain amount of that happening in the UK with some of the English Orchestras, particularly in relation to some of the musicians from a South Asian tradition. Musicians of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background, so some of that collaboration could become more common. But will it become a fused new thing, I don't know.

VP: The issue will arise that there is a danger of it all becoming a false representation or tokenistic if we just smash everything together, especially at the beginning. So, I think it will take a long time, so collaboration will be a more likely root so that those working from different backgrounds and traditions, and artists who have different stories to tell from one another will be able to work on a more even platform to then inform what is being represented on stage.

SA: Yeah, I think the question that comes to my mind is that when we talk about the orchestra, like in a context like Australia, what we're talking about is a Western and European styled orchestra. The question in mind is not that should symphony orchestras play music that isn't Western Classical Music? I think they should play music from everywhere, but should they play music that's not written for symphony orchestra. Probably not. The question is probably a bit more how the society makes space for ensembles or traditions for them to have kind of cultural presence and potentially, some kind of institutional support, and how that all evolves. So there are two different strands isn't there? One thing is lots of different people from different cultures having the opportunity to play in the symphony orchestra space and bring some kind of voice to that might be fresh or informed by other musical traditions, and the other is musicians of whatever other traditions being able to do the music that they do in their own terms with the instruments as they have developed in those cultural contexts. And they are two different things, so what's your sense of all this? You have a non-English speaking background,

more broadly, although obviously you're someone who's a fluent English speaker and what does that background mean to you and how does it intersect with all this classical music stuff?

VP: So, it's a long one. The first thing I learnt was the piano, and I was four years old when the rigorous piano lessons started, so that was my first way into music was, of course, the western tradition. I have always been trained in the western traditions for music, inclusive of composition. So when, in fact, I first entered the Sydney Conservatorium back in 2014, I tried almost actively not to do things that may have been labelled as Asian, because I didn't have awareness of my culture but didn't want to be pigeon-holed, at least artistically, as the Vietnamese composer who writes Vietnamese music and Vietnamese stories in a Vietnamese way. So, I just kept training in the western tradition all to the point where I ended at possibly the most traditionally renowned institution, by getting private lessons with Thierry Escaich through the Conservatoire Nationale Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in Paris. I ended up studying there and it was there where, in fact, that I was actively encouraged to engage with my own cultural knowledge and traditions, not because it was tokenistic but because there was intrigue in terms of the different stories I could tell and bring musically and artistically to the table to share. And this was all in part because what happens in some parts of Paris, which is different from Australia, was that they purposefully programmed a lot of music from different cultures deriving from *their* cultural traditions. So, if I went to the Philharmonie de Paris or Cite de la Musique they would have a Persian group playing all of their traditional music on stage or new music from their community on stage, and then it would followed by a separate concert, almost immediately by the Orchestre de Paris playing Stravinsky and Debussy, so to me they had found a way to represent diversity. Not through the same traditions but to understand that this space, or that the venue of the Philharmonie which is seen to be built for classical music, could house these other forms of classical music. So, perhaps I'm being idealistic but I would be interested in seeing not an exact model, but a similar approach to how the concert hall or stage can be used for diverse story-telling.

SA: So that's less about symphony orchestras making space, but more about venues like Hammer Hall or the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall or the Perth Concert Hall, and these kinds of spaces and the ways these produce or curate events. That they seek out or at least are open to and responsive to these other traditions and their concert programming.

VP: Well the Sydney Opera House has the word Opera in it, but at the end of the day architecture can house different experiences.

SA: That's right. I mean a certain amount of that is happening but it's not clear to me that... I wonder...what might be different to the French or the UK context. It doesn't feel like there's a critical mass around non-Western classical music traditions in Australia in terms of groups that manage to coalesce to create an ongoing ensemble that has a bit of visibility outside of a community. Interestingly, the Sydney Con has actually had its Chinese Music Ensemble and has actually been working somewhat steadily in that way and some people studying composition have written for the Chinese Music Ensemble. There are like there are seeds of things that might lead to that, but they don't feel... the closest thing I can think of is, TaikOz.

VP: And they've worked closely with bigger or more notable organisations like the Sydney Symphony Orchestra premiering new music.

SA: And they have certainly crossed over into quite a broad audience, bringing in that particular Japanese tradition and inflecting it with some significant amount of Australian content and Australian composition within that frame.

VP: Is that then, say organisations like orchestras which are frankly impeded in the public's imagination of what the essence or ultimate vision of classical music is, is it then their responsibility to start reaching out and collaborating with different people and more diverse practitioners in order to represent new things on stage?

SA: That sounds like a good idea to me. Is it their responsibility? It's a really interesting question isn't it? I mean, I guess it keeps going back to what does the society think we should be getting with the public money that we're spending in those spaces? What are we looking for as a society, in what ways do we represent a society as a whole as what has been seen as an art – to some extent – an elite art form? They sort of come and go in their accessibility. I feel sad that we don't have any equivalent of the Proms in Australia. We used to, funnily enough.

VP: Really?

SA: Yeah, the Sydney Symphony used to have Prom concerts in the Town Hall back in the 60s and 70s, and it was more adventurous programming. And it was that whole thing of people – things like cushion concerts and stuff like that, and mixing it up a lot in terms of how people would listen to orchestral concert and what kind of things might happen in it. I mean, it was mixing it up within the context of where the society was at in the 60s and 70s, so it's different from what would happen now if we had something like that. If we did that now, we would be hearing maybe *more* diverse voices than they heard from then.

VP: Hmm, I wonder why that model stopped.

SA: Yeah, why is that not a thing now, I wonder? It's certainly something that connected really strongly with younger audiences, that kind of informality and a more affordable ticket price model, somehow.

VP: Oh yes, that is definitely helpful. In fact, what you briefly mentioned before with SSO's Carriageworks series where there was new music as part of that. I remember going to those concerts and looking around me and seeing a noticeably younger audience, and also a more diverse audience. And maybe that's partly associated with the venue being Carriageworks, the ticket prices at \$35 as opposed to \$120 so it brought in younger audiences, but also you got to see and sometimes meet the composers afterwards and they are living, breathing people. Seeing the industry in a way that reflects the fact that it's a living organism, I think it really inspired a lot of people, maybe I'm too idealistic, but I did see a lot of people under 30, myself included, at that concert.

SA: Absolutely! And obviously it's not as big a space to fill, audience-wise as the Sydney House Concert Hall, but they were packed, those concerts. I suspect they could have filled a larger space than they did fill. Yeah, it certainly seemed to be embraced by probably a smaller part of society than the mainstage concerts but quite a large number nonetheless. And as you say, it's a different group of people, and you would think that that's one of the things Symphony Orchestras need to do is connect with a more diverse audience.

INTERMISSION II

VP: For our first second intermission is another excerpt from Stephen's new album, *Sunset inside the Listening Room*, this time from the track Sunset Night Side.

Follows a 2-minute excerpt of the track 'Sunset Night Side' from Stephen's recent album release *Sunset inside the listening room* (2020)

VP: Yes, so thinking about long-term how to sustain this industry with its generally and statistically speaking, older audience... I mean, if you want to listen to Bach then we need to have a way in which the entire industry will live longer than, to some people, it seems to be declining but it requires nitty-gritty conversations about programming, audiences and new or different story-telling. Despite the industry's legacy of seemingly continually dying, will it be able to last?

SA: It probably will last, and it's probably because something we haven't really gotten to touch on yet. Classical Music is a very significant underpinning of quite large amounts of music in the areas of film and gaming. You know, there's quite a large amount of the population don't think of themselves as being interested in classical music, and don't think of themselves as being classical or not classical, but nonetheless have favourite film scores or favourite games where the music is actually classical in a more nostalgic or a more contemporarily updated kind of way – the language. So, it is still part of things. I mean orchestras have had stabs at this and it is hard to know if the way they've gone around this is a good thing or not. We've seen these concerts of game music and whole film scores played, you know, the Lord of Rings.

VP: And all 8 Harry Potter films. *All 8*. [laughs]

SA: Yeah, Terrifying [laughs] I mean, it doesn't thrill me and it doesn't thrill me but I don't think they need to thrill me with everything they're doing. But it seemed to thrill quite a lot of people with what they're doing. In that light, I should mention an amazing experience in Vienna for the first time in my life, just 6 months ago.

VP: Wow, pre-COVID.

SA: Yeah, I went to 4 concerts in 4 very different contexts over those 4 days. And one of the concerts was to go and hear the Vienna Philharmonic. And the only concert available to hear them during the 4 days I was there was John Williams conducting John Williams with the Vienna Philharmonic with Anne Sophie-Mutter as the soloist with all these special things written for her by John Williams, and John Williams conducting.

And they sold out, in think, 3 or 4 concerts of the same program with the Vienna Philharmonic, which you know is a big venue, and it was a relatively young audience. And the audience was absolutely ecstatic, there were also quite a few family groups and a lot of younger adults, maybe some teenagers, and they were *so* excited. And there was so much enthusiasm from the audience and I left during the 5th encore as we had a late lunch date – this was a morning concert – and in Vienna music starts in the morning, Classical music starts at 9 in the morning. There's always something happening somewhere and it just goes throughout the day, it's sort of a different world. So, I left during the 5th encore, I don't know how many there were but they kept playing new things.

So, it's interesting, where is new classical music and what is contemporary classical music? I guess, it's a lot of different things. And we probably shouldn't forget that, because it's the new classical music that's connecting with the largest numbers of listeners by far.

VP: As there should be many listeners, and that's true and orchestras are now more actively programming in film music or music that is often integrated into other media. I think even the ABC has done something similar. I remember last turning on ABC Classic and there was some film music on the waves. Is that a dedicated hour?

SA: It's a dedicated hour and then an occasionally sprinkling of tracks in other contexts, say in Drive for the evening. There's an hour a week that's dedicated film music with someone presenting who is an expert in that area and passionate about it. Likewise, there's now a dedicated hour of game music on the network, presented by Guy Minishmali from Melbourne who is himself a game music composer. So we're gradually opening that door, and I think that's having an effect on the general programming, because I guess in both of those spaces,

you hear something that is Classical music or Classical-like, but there's kinds of studio aesthetics involved and the aesthetic produced sound as opposed to a classical recording sound is a bit different, so making that more a part of the network has made things a bit more contemporary in terms of the sounds that people expect.

VP: And also, it's very cool to see John Williams, a living composer, alive and conducting his own work.

SA: It was amazing, you know. To my shame, it was not a concert I would have raced to choose to see, I saw it because it was the one I could see. But it was fantastic experience – the sense of that audience engagement and of course the Vienna Philharmonic are one of the world's great orchestras and John Williams' is a huge fan of the French Horn. And boy, do they have French Horn players, and there were 8 French Horn Players on stage and they used all 8 of them, and oh my goodness, you could see in the orchestration that all the French Horn players were playing, sometimes altogether in unison, sometimes in 4 different parts, and some bits where he just uses 2 or 3 or 5, and you hear the weight and colour of those uses of the French Horn which is clearly one of his signature instruments [laughs].

VP: Yes, the French horn seems to be extremely popular and the signature of a lot the more widely recognisable composers for screen. There was interview where Hans Zimmer was talking about writing some music, I think for the Christopher Nolan Batman movies, where he mentioned scoring for this seemingly ridiculous amount of 12 horns. But perhaps this is probably adding into how you mention this change in sound, both in orchestration and how recordings are produced.

SA: Yeah, because if there is that fatter kind of rounder sound of brass instruments being really important in the orchestra... I guess if we think about where orchestras come from and it's essentially what we'd now call a chamber orchestra of string players with a small number of other instruments included, a timpani player, a small number of woodwinds and a French horn with an occasional appearance from trumpets in Baroque or classical scores but, it's just kept moving. And of course, percussion has exploded. That's one of the defining things that's happened in the last 100 years from being a fairly small part of people like Wagner, and so on, to being a massive part of any number of 20th century composer.

VP: So, if we're now going to cover the idea of the historical experience of music or historical experience of programming, say in Bach's time where he was producing a new cantata a week, of course with little re-used segments here and there, but the premise was a new work to confront his audience with on a weekly basis. It was new music all the time and that was a constant experience. So now... we are *still* playing that new music but, it's new music from the 16th and 17th century. The question I have is within the last century, why did we make this substantial cultural shift in the genre of classical music to have such a strong historical focus on the music we produce and continually perform?

SA: So, I think the answer is reasonably clear in a way; it's recordings. I think two things happened: recordings happened and then modernism happened, and maybe they happened together and maybe they are to some degree related. Because suddenly, people have access to this whole tradition and don't just have to go on a special occasion with a large group of people, spending money to hear this music. And you get this whole development throughout the 19th century which gets to its peak in the early part of the 20th century of historical consciousness and a way of seeing human culture and society as being on this progress arc – you know the Hegelian thing which informs Marxism, but also informs a lot of things about capitalism, a lot of the ideology of the last 150 to 200 years, is underpinned by this idea that human history is this unfolding story of development and achievement and discovery and progress, and it's in that context that we then have both a much greater interest in the historical which up until then really wasn't something people thought about that much. People weren't that interested in hearing the music of Bach, you know, 50 years after he was dead. They weren't that interested until Mendelsohn and a few German romantics decided that he was thing. Shakespeare largely dropped out of the picture and he was kind of recovered by the German romantics in the first place and then taken up in England and elsewhere.

That Romanticism really goes hand in hand with nostalgia, so you have the rise of nostalgia and the idea that modernity is kind of exciting and is progress, but is also threatening and is destroying what you love. You get the dark Satanic Mills. One of the famous 19th century poets writing about the dark Satanic Mills... Oh I hate it when I forget things.

VP: Keith Emerson?

SA: No, I don't think so. Although he's very important too...

VP: William Blake! William Blake!

SA: Oh yes, William Blake. That's right, but Emerson is really important in that. The New England Transcendentalists are also a part of this.

VP: How so?

They're both leaning forward and producing something new and dwelling in a kind of nostalgia already, the sense that we're losing various notions of community and of the natural world. They're suddenly creating all these ideas of things that are threatened by technological development and the growth of cities, and all these kinds of things. They're kind of contemporary myths in a way, because human history has always been full of development and change, and the natural and the technological aren't really separate. And we created this mythos and then there is this emotional attachment to the past, and then you get the recording and those two things together and suddenly all of the past is accessible. And so, through the recording we get used to listening to music we know rather than music we don't know.

VP: In specifically just the classical music sphere? Because if we look at jazz or pop music, there seems to be a yearning to new records?

SA: I think it happens across music, but the thing about pop music, pop music also connects in with dance and youth culture, and emerging youth culture, so that drives its movement forward, and the audience for new stuff. But still, each generation gets stuck with the music they knew and keep listening to it.

VP: That's true. And then they call it the "classics."

SA: That's right. But for me, listening to pop music as a teenage, anything that happened before the late 60s, didn't exist for me. For example, someone like Elvis Presley, I thought "why would someone go and listen to that?! For God's Sake!" Even the early Beatles seemed completely uninteresting, and the whole world of pop music, or rock music, was basically started around the time of psychedelia and prog rock and electric blues, and the explosion of that kind of stuff and then continued into punk and post-punk and the disco era, and electronica,

and all that stuff. And things before then didn't seem to exist. And that's not the case for my kids, and it's not because they're particularly nostalgic or reactionary, it's just that, the reference points are so much broader now, it's just changed. So that now is always in the context of a huge then [laughs]

VP: [laughs] So this latent romanticism, if I can call it that, has perpetuated our idea of what a classical experience is in relation to ourselves and how we associate with an image of the past being, in some ways, an ideal one. Do you think this relates to our experiences outside of classical music, but to the experiences with our environment?

SA: I think one of the huge discoveries of the last few years, in Australia, has been this revelation that the natural world of Australia that the British invaders, explorers, colonists or whatever you want to call them, saw was the natural world that was created by the way that First Nations people treated that environment. So, in fact, it wasn't some sort of, it wasn't some pre-human or non-human landscape. It was a landscape that was already heavily shaped by human cultural activity and agricultural activity. And so, it's one of the weird things that when we talk about this nostalgia thing that it's fascinating that we have national parks. I am very glad that we do have national parks, by the way, I'm not at all interested in arguing against them but at the same time there is something very strange and arcane and very modern about a national park. Ideally what would happen is we would live in a landscape and take care of it, but what we do instead is trash large parts of it and then section off bits and can't really do anything with this, leave it alone, this is nature. And the natural world that we inherited when we came, my ancestors came from Europe, and invaded this place. The actual place that we inherited was shaped by human activity for thousands and thousands of years. It wasn't, the beautiful parkland they walked into in the plains of Western Sydney, that didn't happen from no humans doing anything, that happened through humans doing all these patterns of seasonal burning and harvesting... it's interesting. So, there is a delusion there about the thing we're about to lose, because the thing we're about to lose never existed.

VP: Indeed, and although we could probably talk for hours, this is probably a poignant place to bring it all to a close. Thank you so much for your time and your insight into a range of fascinating topics.

SA: Thank you, I enjoyed myself. I hope that wasn't too self-indulgent.

VP: Not at all! Always a pleasure to talk with you! Thank you so much again for being on the podcast, I'm the audience right now listening to your voice has been a treat, especially for us to look into the world of radio, programming, the new music scene, audiences and the power of nostalgia. For everyone listening, details about Stephen and his work, including his own podcast the New Waves are available in the description, and you can purchase Stephen's album, *Sunset inside the listening room*, as a digital album or on vinyl through Bandcamp. All the details will be posted in the description. Interestingly part of the title refers to the ABC program 'The Listening Room' that was axed in 2004 just before Stephen beginning his work there. Do check out his music and work, and I'll catch you all next time!

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RESOURCES

Stephen Adams

<https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/artist/adams-stephen>
<https://www.abc.net.au/classic/stephen-adams/8168144>

The New Waves Podcast: <https://www.abc.net.au/classic/programs/new-waves/#:~:text=with%20Stephen%20Adams&text=For%20listeners%20interested%20in%20Australian,RSS%20and%20other%20podcast%20apps.>

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<https://harriganslanecollective.bandcamp.com/album/sunset-inside-the-listening-room>

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