

Plato's Cave: Realities of Composing in New Zealand

The inaugural Lilburn Lecture, presented by the Lilburn Trust and the Alexander Turnbull Library in association with the New Zealand School of Music and Radio New Zealand Concert; delivered at the Hunter Council Chamber of the Victoria University of Wellington on 2 November 2013, and first broadcast by Radio New Zealand Concert on 18 December 2013.

FIRSTLY, MY THANKS TO VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON for accommodating us in this splendid Hunter Building Council Room, rich with the warm glow of scholarship past and the cold sweat of Performance Based Research Funding present. Thank you also to Radio New Zealand for making the occasion all the more of an occasion as I poke my head above the parapet (wisely or unwisely, time will tell); and to the New Zealand School of Music, especially Stephen Gibbs, for assembling such a talented trio of musicians as staff member Jian Liu on piano, senior student Reuben Chin on tenor saxophone and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra violist Peter Barber; to upstage me over the next hour. Lastly I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Lilburn Trust of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, for inviting me to be the inaugural speaker in what I am sure will be a lineup of increasingly proficient speakers as the Lilburn address becomes, over time, a premiere platform for discourse on music matters in New Zealand.

Why *Plato's Cave* you may be wondering? The short answer is that a few years ago I composed a work with that title, after a philosophical tale by Plato. In this tale, Plato challenges our assumptions about perception and reality.

He invites us to imagine a cave in which prisoners have been chained, facing a wall, since birth. They can only see shadows on a wall cast by their captors as they move unseen behind them. For the prisoners, the shadows are real and all that they have ever known, and they grow skilled at interpreting what they see.

Eventually one prisoner escapes the cave. Blinded by the sun at first, he gradually becomes aware that what he believed to be reality was only the shadows of reality.

The prisoner returns to the cave to enlighten his fellow prisoners. He tries to free them but they no longer trust him. They believe that he is delusional, dangerous and damaged by whatever he has experienced outside the cave. That his eyes, now unaccustomed to the dark, are no longer able to interpret the shadows on the wall is proof enough. They kill him out of a sense of self-protection.

The composition I wrote called *Plato's Cave* isn't a literal depiction of this tale (the title came after the work). Rather, it's a piece in which the general confusions of what may or may not be reality, when applied to composition in general and New Zealand composition in particular, are in loose agreement with the tenor of Plato's argument. To Plato, knowledge acquired through the senses amounts to no more than opinion – a perception of reality rather than, necessarily, reality itself. True knowledge – and Plato loses my vote at this point – is attainable only through philosophical reasoning.

Basing my address around the composition I called *Plato's Cave* has allowed me to justify including music in my talk – one of my own compositions no less; and even more, no less, a tonal work performed in this very birthplace of New Zealand musical modernism, the Hunter Building where, so legend has it, the staff used to speak in iso-rhythms and think in retrograde inversion. Also, by including this composition of mine I have not only brought you some respite from my voice but also very craftily, given myself the topic and the title of the address: *Plato's Cave: Realities of Composing in New Zealand*.

Now you may well be thinking that if this is his short answer, what is his long answer going to be like? Well...sit back, relax and think of New Zealand. It is now underway, beginning with a performance of 'Shadows', movement 1, from my *Plato's Cave*.

Musicians play movement 1, 'Shadows', of Plato's Cave.

I first met Douglas Lilburn when he was in his mid-60s. Today he would be 98, and I am 60, just – a senior citizen in training. Much has changed in the intervening years. Back then, self-styled man-of-the-people Robert Muldoon was Prime Minister, and New Zealand had one of the most protected economies in the world. Now, self-styled man-of-the-people John Key is Prime Minister, and we have one of the least protected.

In the late 1970s, you could say the words 'New Zealand music' and people would think of Douglas Lilburn, David Farquhar and The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Use those words today and most minds would turn to Dave Dobbyn, Lorde and Fat Freddie's Drop.

Back then, New Zealand composers were seen in the sense that they received reasonable coverage through the mainstream print media, but struggled to be heard. Now they are heard to a slightly greater degree, but struggle to be seen.

Back then, you could study music at one of four university music departments and aim to graduate with a choice of perhaps half a dozen degrees or diplomas. Today, you can choose to study with up to 20 registered providers of tertiary music, and select from perhaps 50 different qualifications.

Back then, in those days of beige and flared trousers we had an arts world in which Artistic and Music Directors topped the totem pole and administrators were the underlings: underpaid and sometimes even unpaid, serving for the love of the art. Now, administrators rule the roost and Music Directors – if on the payroll at all – reside off the reservation, in many cases far from the organisations that they musically direct.

Back then, we laughed at our parents and grandparents for their cultural timidity, and scoffed at their reliance on overseas expertise for opinion and guidance. Today, we pride ourselves on our musical maturity, without really understanding that we are *more than ever* reliant on overseas specialists for that pride.

Do you know that in nearly 70 years, we have never had a New Zealand-born Music Director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra? In 60 years we have only ever had one New Zealand-born director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet. The Christchurch Symphony Orchestra,

Auckland Philharmonia, Royal New Zealand Ballet, even Orchestra Wellington all have music directors born elsewhere; and of our country's current eight music professors, only three are New Zealanders by birth or undergraduate training. One would need to go back to 1960 to find a lower representation of local academic leadership, and possibly back to the 1940s for a lower representation of leadership from the podium. And I don't even want to ask what percentage of NZSO principals are New Zealanders by birth or naturalisation.

So does this mean that we have 20 institutions training 100s of music students for a handful of jobs that we are mainly awarding to applicants who have trained elsewhere?

This is not xenophobia rising, for these overseas imports are often genuine specialists in their fields – Exhibit A, on stage with me now, Jian Liu, piano maestro. Fresh blood brings in fresh ideas without which, whatever the source, New Zealand would atrophy artistically – as indeed it nearly did in the 1930s, when all seven of its tertiary music lecturers and professors were over-qualified English-born and bred organists offering the very music education that Douglas Lilburn railed against in his now classic Cambridge Music School address of 1946.

I can't help wondering though, where are the opportunities in New Zealand for New Zealand's own graduates to shine? Is our music education system so deficient that we are failing to produce musical leaders who have the capability and the confidence to lead? Or is it our deep-rooted sense of cultural inferiority creeping to the surface again and tripping up our talent from the outset?

New Zealand's relationship with the great 'overseas' has run in cycles. In some generations when confidence is low, we can't seem to get enough advice or leadership from abroad. At other times when confidence is high, we perversely ignore it, wilfully claiming the right to repeat mistakes already made elsewhere.

Going way back to the 1890s, for instance, confidence was so high that some commentators were predicting that New Zealand would become a world centre for cultural excellence and creative endeavour. I kid you not. Within a decade artists were leaving New Zealand by the shipload,

escaping what William Pember Reeves described in verse at the time as 'A land without a past, a race set in the rut of commonplace'.

One such escape artist was Frances Hodgkins about whom I recently collaborated on a musical with playwright Stuart Hoar which we titled *The Great Art War*. Hopefully it will be coming your way soon, but until that happy day here is a snippet of one of the lyrics I wrote for it. The literary minded among you may spot some references to the poetry of the times, not the least of these being to ARD Fairburn's classic poem 'I'm Older than You, Please Listen'.

FRANCES:

*We were neither fish nor fowl
As we often said with spleen;
Not English nor New Zealanders
But somewhere in between.*

*We were born on southern soil
Children of the times;
Our feet on the ground but our heads in the air
Looking up to northern climes.*

*And we were told 'Get out, get out
Before your roots are down;
Ship out to Megalopilis
For riches and renown'.*

CHORUS OF NEW ZEALANDERS

To the tune of 'God defend New Zealand':

*God defend our Māoriland
Keep us stifled, make us bland;
Banish colour, worship grey,
Send our arty types away.*

FRANCES:

*We were offered little choice
So we headed overseas;
Exported as superfluous,
Like butter, milk and cheese.*

*In our garrets and our lofts
We were hungry for success;
Though we struggled and we starved
At least we had the right address.*

*For we were there to seize the day
Like moths towards a flame;
Antipodean geniuses
In blind pursuit of fame.*

*CHORUS OF NEW ZEALANDERS:
Thank you God for 'Overseas'
It's our source of expertise;
When it comes to arts and craft
We can't tell our wheat from chaff.
Sent us down your crits and quotes,
Help sort out the sheep from goats,
Guide us through our low-brow haze,
Tell us who deserves our praise.*

... and so on, I'm sure you get my drift.

On being invited to deliver this inaugural Lilburn address it didn't take long for a general topic to emerge. It was sparked by a phrase in one of the diaries Douglas Lilburn kept in the early 1970s that has stayed in my brain since first encountering it a decade ago.

This phrase, only partially remembered, was 'traversing the desert of my fifties'. Douglas found his 50s to be a trying time collegially and compositionally, and I would have to say I haven't enjoyed traversing that particular terrain either – especially not with freelance composition as an occupation. One of the great mysteries of society in general and the arts in particular is why – given their relative experience and, in some cases even accumulated wisdom – we place so little value on our 50-year-olds. To be sure, when 50-year-olds are in secure employment they receive top dollar – if not for their talents, then for their length of service and position in an organisation's hierarchy. But when 50-year-olds are not in secure employment they are fair game, occupationally speaking, for the knacker's yard.

In real estate terms, 50-year-olds are the dwellings with faded contemporary charm, too old to be fashionable and too young to have attained any heritage value: doer-uppers in need of a makeover, or, bowl-em-overs.

Anyway, suffice it to say that for Douglas Lilburn, his mid-50s was a time for serious rumination. Out of this reflection emerged a number of insightful conclusions about the human condition, along with – in the best of *mea culpa* traditions – admissions of misjudgment. The full 'traversing the desert' quote was part of what amounted to a prayer by Douglas for his future spiritual and creative well-being. He wrote:

May I continue to enjoy and discover and gain understanding. May I, like an Otago stream that goes underground in dry season, emerge to rediscover my earlier faith and purpose and direction. I don't feel that my imagination and power to work has gone, rather feel I'm traversing some necessary desert of my 50s in order to shed illusions, and learn a vastly wider human historic tradition of experience and faith and perplexity, and learn to take courage of endurance from these great voices of the past, and learn to accept the human condition.

Unlike Douglas, I can't claim to have had any epiphanies of experience, faith or perplexities during my 50s: but with the help of a few arts administrators I've managed to shed an astonishing number of illusions.

I'll air just one for now – a behemoth in the kingdom of disillusion, on a par with discovering the truth about the tooth fairy.

A few years back I was aware of a commissioning project in the offing for which I believed I was ideally placed as a composer. It went to someone else, and on enquiry I found out that I had not even been considered because...and here it comes, because, in the eyes of the commissioning organisation I was of 'insufficient strategic value'. Never mind whether or not I might have been a more suitable choice artistically; I didn't even make it to their shortlist on account of their imputation of my strategic value as sub-prime.

Questions flooded my brain: 'How does one acquire strategic value as a composer?' 'Does one seek it or does it fall into one's lap?' 'Can it be bought, borrowed, rented or sold; or is it something you either have or don't have, as per that imbecilic catch-all for absence of analytical acumen, the 'x' factor?' But one question floated above the rest: 'What has 'strategic value' got to do to with composing?' This was not a topic that had been covered when I was a music student at Canterbury in the 1970s. (Come to think of it, very little to do with the everyday practicalities of anything had; but that, after all, was the beauty and truth of a tertiary education before the smoke and mirrors of Rogernomics. Greed was not good back then.)

Of 'insufficient strategic value'! What planet was that administrator from? Hadn't he or she ever heard of artistic integrity? If art isn't honest surely it must be a lie, a fabrication, an illusion; and when art is a lie, surely it ceases to be art and becomes craft, or worse, a sleight of hand. How very foreign it was to my idea of how things ought to be, and then... and then it dawned...perhaps it wasn't a question of what planet the administrator was from. Perhaps it was a question of what planet I was from – the same one, evidently, on which the tooth fairy recycles enamel for a living.

For all I now know, all composition commissions might sprout from strategic rather than artistic grounds.

And so today, in a funny sort of a way, instead of sticking pins in an effigy of the arts administrator concerned, I can say that I am grateful for his or her honesty, and confess a sneaky admiration for the fact that he or she was able to relate this information to me without a sliver of embarrassment.

Reality Number 1: Arts administrators aren't in the business of promoting art; they're in the business of acting in the best interests of their employing organisation. And if they aren't, given our dog-eat-dog free market, heaven help their organisation.

As an epitaph for this and other illusions turned into Swiss cheese, the next commission I received I called *Plato's Cave*. We've had 'Shadows' – here is 'Light' – movement 2.

Musicians play movement 2, 'Light', of Plato's Cave.

As Plato himself might say if he were alive today: 'Artes plena sunt twaddle' – The arts are full of twaddle. Except, of course, he would probably say it in classical Greek. And he'd be right. The arts *are* full of twaddle: pretentious, conceited, puffed-up, ostentatious methane-inflated twaddle. Some of it is even fraudulent. Imitations pose as innovations; the crass masquerades as the profound; hoaxes wrap themselves in the tartan of the real McCoy; and empty vessels spout forth sounds of such magnitude they cannot help but succeed in gaining the attention that they so clearly seek.

But the arts are also full of energy, wit, insight, beauty (sometimes even in ugliness), intellect, substance and integrity: shining examples of what sets humans apart from animals – the ability to express abstractions, philosophise, argue, expound or educate, and at the same time even entertain. Like the rock paintings of cave dwellers, the arts at their best provide a summary of their age and place – not a matter-of-fact account, but an encapsulation of the spirit of the times. At their most durable, whether in original form or reproduction, the arts are the gift of one age to another.

If only one could objectively separate art from artifice, the gold from the dross, one could approach the arts with a sense of certainty. Yet one cannot, and that very elusiveness is something to celebrate. This is, in itself (from a consumer's perspective only I hasten to add), one of the most exciting truths about the arts. There are no absolutes, no rights or wrongs, no bests or worsts. There is only individual (or collaborative) expression that elicits an individual response.

Sometimes individual responses are sufficiently similar in number to become accepted as a collective response, which in turn is used to draw generalised conclusions. That 'Mozart is a great composer' is one such example. It is a sentence that would likely flit by listeners to this address unless I ask the question: 'Who says so?' Realisation might then dawn that the statement 'Mozart is a great composer' is not a universal truth. It is a subjective response, possibly even a learnt response inculcated over

time, that consultation with any loather of classical music would confirm as such.

If received wisdom on an artist of Mozart's historical standing can be so easily open to contest, what hope is there for any certainty when evaluating the worth of the modern artist? For its extremes of ridiculousness, one of the most thought-provoking artworks of the 20th century, to my mind, is by Italian artist Piero Manzoni dating from 1961.

For this piece, which he titled *Merda d'Artista*, Manzoni deposited 30 grams of his own excrement inside 90 numbered cans, sealed them under the label '100% pure artist's s.h.i.t' (in four languages), and placed them on the market for the price of their weight in gold. The fact that a number of the cans have since exploded or leaked (as Forrest Gump said, 'it happens'), has only served to increase rather than decrease the value of the product. Was Manzoni being a conceptual artist or a con artist? Were his cans full of meaning or were they full of what the label said they were full of? The fact that 90 initial purchasers confirmed Manzoni's cans to be worth their weight in gold by paying that price is not even a reliable guide. The purchasers may have bought the cans for their perceived quality as investments rather than their perceived quality as artworks. If they did, they were canny investors, no pun intended, for the current estimated value of a single can of Manzoni's s.h.i.t. is between 25 and 35,000 US dollars. The cans have increased in value up to 20 times that of gold!

The problems of lack of certainty in the arts are compounded in music, for the art-form itself is essentially abstract, and therefore can carry no meaning in the sense of what we understand the meaning of 'meaning' to be.

Stripped of association with words, either through the setting of a text or the use of a connotative title, music becomes simply – or rather extremely complexly – patterns of sound waves that elicit varying responses from the listener. These responses can range in their extremes from whoops of exaltation to hoots of derision, from tears of sadness to smiles of pleasure. Such instinctual responses will vary hugely from listener to listener in accordance with a range of pre-disposing factors. Of

these factors, familiarity with the patterns of sounds on offer would be the most influential; and learnt responses through peer pressure or worse, academic sanctification, would be a close second.

In New Zealand as you probably know, there are currently two premier composing awards: one for 'popular' song writing (the APRA Silver Scroll, first presented in 1965); and one for 'classical' composition (SOUNZ Contemporary Award, established by the Centre for New Zealand Music, and first presented in 1998). Both awards are presented at an annual APRA-organised function attended principally by the songwriters, composers and publishers of APRA's membership. In the early years of the SOUNZ Contemporary Award presentations, the organisers attempted to present an extract of the winning works at each function. Despite the fact that these compositions had been judged by a panel of experts to be the finest the country had produced that year; and despite the fact that they were performed to an audience with a demonstrable interest, expertise and experience in music, they were greeted – by a portion of the audience – with cat-calls, laughter and raucous snorts of disbelief. How could one stream of expression have grown so far apart from another within the single art-form of music? (Indeed, how could one group of musicians be so intolerant of the creativity of another to offer such a boorish reaction?) Clearly a proportion of the audience found it difficult to accept that the winning works were music, let alone – according to a panel of each composer's peers – the finest examples of their ilk.

These days the organisers continue to present extracts of the winning works, but contract an 'arranger' to present these extracts in such a way that minimises the recurrence of such receptions. I have my own views on this compromise which, uncharacteristically, I shall keep to myself.

Notwithstanding, I would like to say two things on the subject. The first is to ask a question that I think Plato would want to ask. Why do we need two awards? Is it because without the SOUNZ Contemporary Award the potential winners of a SOUNZ Contemporary Award would not have the opportunity to win an award given that the Silver Scroll does not – nor is ever likely to – cater for their manner of music? I know the answer to this is 'Yes', as I was on a panel of composers who originally discussed

establishing such a prize. Which would lead my friend Plato to the obvious follow-up: 'If you need two awards for this reason, what about the composers who will never win either the APRA Silver Scroll or the SOUNZ Contemporary Award, because the music they compose will never be considered popular enough or contemporary enough by a panel of peers?' Should there not be a third award to cater for them? And with respect to such a third award, I'm certain Plato would find it child's play to prove logically that there ought to be an award for compositions that fall between the APRA Silver Scroll and the SOUNZ Contemporary Award purviews. And what about the outer extremes of expression? Should there not also be an award for music so experimental that it scares the bejeezus out of the SOUNZ Contemporary judges? And one for music so formulaic that it rewrites the manual for the APRA Silver Scroll judges, on what constitutes a well-written popular song?

The other thing I'd like to say on the subject is that as a musicologist I am delighted there is such an award as the SOUNZ Contemporary Award because it places an annual stake in the ground bearing the inscription 'best in show'. In decades to come, musicologists can look on the winners of this award and gain insight into what were judged to be the finest compositions of the day. It may be that these winning works will be met by future musicologists with disbelief, incomprehension, and even laughter, for that is how we tend now to respond to the music our Victorian great-grandparents held in high esteem. Or it may be that musicologists of the future will be delighted with what they hear. Only time will tell. Whatever the reaction, having a stake in the ground is a good thing.

I mention all of this by way of introducing the notion that our individual or collective responses to music are not fixed over time, but remain fluid. How we perceive music is entwined with the ethos of the time, and in this sense – and as much as some traditional classical music devotees may wish to think otherwise – classical music is as susceptible to fads and fashions as any other commodity that relies on subjective responses for its success.

The *pretence* of indifference to fads or fashions used to be one of the defining differences between classical composition and popular composition in the 20th century. According to classical music theory, popular songs were written to cash in on a commercial market: here today and gone tomorrow – surfing the waves of musical fashion. Classical compositions by contrast, were written for posterity, and were by that very fact, above faddishness.

As it is turning out, popular music of the 20th and 21st centuries is showing greater signs of durability than classical compositions. Perversely, with an increasing emphasis on ‘innovationism’ as a primary measure of a work’s validity (a counter-intuitive measurement of a project’s worthiness still archaically over-employed by Creative New Zealand), classical composition is increasingly forced to ride the wave of faddishness.

New Zealand ‘popular’ music of the 1970s and 1980s has become today’s classical music; and our ‘classical’ music of the 1970s and 1980s has, to a large extent, gone the way the musical establishment of my generation insisted popular music would go.

Many commentators attribute the decline in prominence of classical music over the last century to the fact that 20th-century composers so alienated audiences with their experimentation that classical music lost the means of refreshing itself, and as a result became increasingly dependent on recreating the musical glories of the past to sustain itself. This may be so, but there are also other factors at play.

I think Douglas Lilburn was closer to the reason when he wrote in his Otago diary in the early 1970s:

Let me face it, I’ve never properly considered the rationale of this medium, this language I’ve called ‘music’ in which I’ve tried to be practitioner; to communicate. I’ve boxed-on in a very narrow segment of it, snobbishly selected, a reflection of the esoteric great-master tradition, [and] have done this in a remote provincial backwater isolated from tradition and practice of the main stream, relying for support on practitioners in the same large predicament as myself.

The key words for me are 'I've boxed-on in a very narrow segment of it' and 'snobbishly selected'.

I'll let the words hang while I observe that the popular music which members of the musical establishment fought so hard to keep at bay, is now the very music helping to sustain our orchestras and prop up our university music departments.

Never mind the Gershwins, Porters and other contributors to the Great American Songbook writers; I'm talking about our own Kiwi musicians. Douglas Lilburn wasn't even honoured with a concert devoted to his music when he died, but Split Enz, Dave Dobbyn and others have them with increasing frequency while they are still alive.

Classical music has been forced into pimping itself to stay afloat. Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan of fusion and cross-over as you will have gathered by the movements of my *Plato's Cave* composition so far. Indeed, the entire history of music is a long lineage of begging, borrowing and stealing bits of music from outside its tradition; but I think the musical establishment of the 20th century forgot this for a while. No, I use the word 'pimped' to convey my disdain of the fact that the 'snobbishly selected' classical music establishment has admitted popular influences into its inner sanctums not because it wants to, but because it has had to, to remain commercially viable.

One of the theories I held in the early stages of researching my history of New Zealand composition was that the works we enjoy listening to, and the works we feel we ought to be listening to, are not one and the same. In order to test whether I was being delusional in this respect I conducted a survey, inviting as many people as I could think of with a broad overview of New Zealand composition to compile two lists of New Zealand works: one of their top ten favourites, and one of those they believed to be the masterpieces of New Zealand music - 'iconic works', if you like.

While the number of responses I received was too low to be statistically meaningful, trends nevertheless emerged. My theory was backed up by the fact that an average of only three works, or 30%, were listed as both a favourite and an icon.

There were sufficient titles in common on the icon lists for me to feel comfortable announcing them publicly, which I shall do shortly. There were *insufficient* titles in common on the favourites lists for me to draw any conclusions, except to note a relationship between the city in which the respondents and the composers resided. People clearly favoured works by composers who lived in their same city. Why? I am guessing it is partly the feel-good friendship factor: humans are more likely to listen with generous intent to the work of someone they know and like – or know of and like the idea of – than a total stranger. But it is equally plausible to be an issue of access. If you don't have the chance to hear a work, you can't form an opinion of it; and as a generalisation, New Zealand composers tend to receive the greatest number of performances of their works in the areas in which they reside.

It's also important to note that all of the works on the icon lists are available on commercially released recordings, and have been published and widely distributed. Most of the works on the favourites lists were unpublished and unrecorded.

Another fascinating observation was that virtually no popular songs were listed on the icon lists, which was not surprising given the fact that I had approached people who I knew were interested in – and knowledgeable about – 'serious' composition, and had made it clear that this was a survey about composition not song-writing. Yet this didn't stop people from including many pop songs on their list of favourites.

What did I learn from this exercise? Many things, but principally confirmation that there is a large gap between the art we feel we ought to be appreciating and the art that we enjoy. I don't know about you, but I find this disturbing. The theorist in me feels that they ought to be one and the same, but the pragmatist knows they are not and probably never will be. (Janet Frame, one of New Zealand's most revered writers, once described herself as 'New Zealand's greatest unread author'. I hope we never get to the situation where we revere a New Zealand composer to the point he or she feels compelled to describe him or herself as New Zealand's greatest un-listened-to composer.)

Anyway, here, as voted for in 2007 by a statistically un-meaningful tally of voters are the top ten iconic New Zealand compositions. I am pleased to say that most of these works also featured as favourites on some people's lists without also being icons. They are obviously compositions that are liked as well as ones that we like the idea of.

- 1st Douglas Lilburn *Symphony No. 2.*
- 2nd Douglas Lilburn *Overture: Aotearoa.*
- 3rd David Farquhar *Ring Round the Moon.*
- 4th Douglas Lilburn *Sings Harry.*
- 5th John Psathas *View from Olympus.*
- 6th= John Ritchie *Concertino for Clarinet and String Orchestra*
and Douglas Lilburn *Symphony No. 3.*
- 8th Gareth Farr *From the Depths Sound the Great Sea Gongs.*
- 9th Jack Body *Carol to Saint Stephen.*
- 10th Larry Pruden *Harbour Nocturne.*

By way of saluting the sponsor of this talk, and wishing him a happy birthday, I'd also like to reveal the two works that came in 11th equal – *Landfall in Unknown Seas* and *The Return*. This takes Douglas Lilburn's tally to six out of 12 of the iconic compositions – not bad for a 98-year-old.

My time is almost up. I had free choice in what I could talk about in this address – so why did I choose to talk about what I have?

I have been privileged to spend my working life, so far, doing what I love to do best: composing things – be it music, or lyrics towards a musical, or sentences towards a book. It hasn't been easy, and here is the funny thing: it could only have been easier had I worked inside the musical establishment and enjoyed the level of state patronage that comes with it, in particular to employees of tertiary music departments.

But had I been able to do this, the body of work I have assembled over the last 40 years would have been substantially different from what it has been.

Some people might say 'What a shame this wasn't so', to which I would reply 'That is beside the point'. The fact that I am certain it would have

been different is, I think, both a sad and a happy comment on the different perspectives and realities experienced by those who work inside an institution and those who work outside it. 'Sad' because one has to ask, 'Why should this have to be so?' 'Happy', because it brings us a greater diversity of ideas and expressions; and this is something to celebrate even if one thinks the other person's ideas are nothing but twaddle, or not twaddlish enough.

Incidentally, I'm not suggesting that those composers who work in our universities are the prisoners of Plato's Cave – but believe it if you wish. Any staff member faced with writing or composing for a PBRF ranking might justifiably feel that way. But, as a freelance composer, I often feel that I am chained in a cave of my own devising, surrounded by shadows of salivating wolves and the perception of an ever-increasing number of arts administrators offering ever-diminishing crumbs of sustenance. Whoever is wherever, I know my music has been shaped by my environment and by what I have perceived to be reality – and of that I am proud.

Time to record the loss of one last illusion during the desert trek of my 50s. Someone once asked whether it bothered me when I spend months composing a complex work and it earns peanuts, while someone else spends a few minutes writing a pop song and it makes millions. My answer was that it used to bother me, but it doesn't now. It's just part of what makes life as a freelance composer the adventure that it is. No, I'm far more aggrieved at the excesses that our bankers, our insurance companies, and our civil service CEOs indulge in; but the challenges of reining in the rich are, alas, fodder for a different forum.

What I do know is that it's incredibly easy to write a pop song that *could* or *should* be a chart topper. I've written dozens of them. The difficult part is crossing from *could be* or *should be* to the *is* a chart topper, and that's where a loathsome skill-set known as marketing comes into play – plus of course, a dollop of lady luck. I have been delusional for most of my career in this respect, under the impression that the most important task of being a composer was to compose quality material; and that if I did this, my material would somehow rise to general attention

even if the only copy was sitting in the darkest recesses of my backroom wardrobe. Strangely this is not the case, though the silverfish are appreciative of my marketing methods.

Did I mention earlier that I have written a musical with Stuart Hoar about Frances Hodgkins, and that it is called *The Great Art War*, and I am hoping someone will stage it your way soon? Yes of course I did; it's called hammering the brand in the la-la land of Marketing Inc.

While researching for this musical I came across a phrase in one of Frances Hodgkins's letters home from the early 1920s in which she wrote: 'It is a horrible age of self-advertisement. Success is difficult unless you can get the ear of the press and get yourself written up and talked about.'

This sparked an idea for a song in which I was forced to conclude that it isn't who you are, or what you produce, that's important; it's how you present it that counts. Reality is irrelevant, perception rules.

*If just doesn't matter if you're big or tall,
If just doesn't matter if you're short or small,
Good looking, ugly, a drunk or a tree,
As long as you can get publicity.*

*The name of the game is publicity,
Furthering the cause of you and me.
Nothing's off-limits if you want to be
A well-known face or a V.I.P.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.*

*You might be perverted,
You might be a saint.
You could be good in bed
Or wet as paint.
A liar...A lover...
A dope or a pope!
Publicity will help you up a slippery slope.*

*The name of the game is publicity,
Drawing attention to you and me.
Nothing's too sordid to do or be*

*To get a little bit of publicity.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.*

*You might have the skills to paint with finesse
A realistic nude or a modernistic mess.
Your talent may be bigger than de Vinci or Degas
But unless you've a name you won't go far.*

*The name of the game is publicity,
You won't make it only on ability.
So start dreaming up what to do or be
To get a little bit of publicity.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.*

*Actors, lawyers, sportsmen and arty types,
Those who preach, and those who want to air their gripes;
Businessmen and pillars of society
Are who they are through publicity.*

*The name of the game is publicity,
The short-cut to wealth or an OBE.
Throw away your pride and your dignity
And get a leg up with publicity.
Yeah, yeah, yeah!*

And with the illusion that 'good music markets itself' laid to rest, and having achieved a contentment of sorts, I can now look forward to frolicking 'beyond the cave' in the green pastures of my 60s. To celebrate this prospect, here is 'Beyond the Cave', the third movement of my *Plato's Cave* – a composition that will never win me a SOUNZ Contemporary Award nor an APRA Silver Scroll and probably would not have met with Douglas Lilburn's approval, but I hope you enjoy listening to it none the less. Thank you for your attention. It has been an honour and a privilege to speak here today.

Musicians play movement 3, 'Beyond the Cave', of Plato's Cave.
