



That Sound is Percussion Snaring Key Performances

Percussion's asset for fitting the glove of most music ensembles is generating a rising interest in student participation, and a growing demand for international performances, according to eminent musician and mentor Daryl Pratt.

American-born Pratt, who is the Chair of Percussion at The Con, has seen the three components of the genre - timpani, snare and keyboard - in and out of popularity with students over the years but the current direction is up.

"Percussion is definitely prone to being in and out. It is a multi-faceted discipline rather than a one-off specialty and this can prove problematical to young people," he says.

"The level of music education is a powerful influence in determining the flow-through to tertiary study. The interest is there at the primary and secondary levels, but lack of funding is an issue because it impacts on the availability of instruments and training.

"What is helping drive interest in the current tertiary cycle is the fascination with multiple instrumentation and growing opportunities for performing. This is also an upside for future post Grad development."

Pratt, who migrated to Australia from California in 1985, conducts The Con's Modern Music Ensemble as well as teaches composition and jazz and points to a demanding schedule of concerts that is both a challenge and a lure for students.

Last week he and three of his students – Anna Zeltzer (Kirribilli), Andrew Chan (Sydney) and Josh Hill (Waitara) – played in premiere performances of two new Australian works – "Two Views from Here" by Gerard Brophy and "Three Places in Kathmandu" by Michael Askill.

These two ensemble quartet pieces are part of the inaugural phase of the ambitious 101 Compositions for 100 Years project initiated this year as part of celebrations for The Con's centenary in 2015.

At the end of the month Pratt, of Lane Cove, will lead a Con percussion troupe to Asia for ensemble concerts and master classes in Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Earlier this year they hosted American percussion specialist Brian Zator in residence at The Con and at the end of October he and his students will play at the Sydney Optimum Percussion Eistedfodd with the acclaimed Brazilian composer and soloist Ney Rosauero.

And the pressure will continue to mount next year, with Pratt conducting The Modern Music Ensemble at the World Expo in Shanghai and in Sydney for the World New Music Days Festival – the world's largest contemporary classic music event.

Pratt's musicianship doesn't end there. He has recently established a new Jazz ensemble The Daryl Pratt Sextet, performs in MATCH Percussion, a duet he founded with his wife Alison Pratt in 2001 (also featured in next year's World New Music Days Festival) and is gearing up for the Australian premier of Steve Reich's 'Double Sextet' with The Australian Ensemble on October 24.

"There's no rest for the wicked, and that is the way we like it...percussion might not be the sexiest area of music but the great thing is that it's always in demand," he adds.

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