



WOLL  
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50  
YRS

1972  
-2022

WOLLONGONG  
CONSERVATORIUM  
OF MUSIC

POSITIVE CHANGE  
Through  
Music

wollcon.com.au

# 50 Years

1972-2022

What began as a provider of music education with classes delivered in a local church building, the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music has become a musical icon of the community, whose home is an historic manor house and school nestled in a beautiful corner of Wollongong Botanic Garden.

## THE BEGINNING

WollCon is one of the largest of seventeen regional conservatoriums in New South Wales and is supported by the NSW Government, the University of Wollongong, Wollongong City Council and BlueScope WIN Community Partners Program.

The conservatorium began in September 1972 as a Branch of the NSW State Conservatorium of Music. Inaugural Director Mr Jim Powell began teaching a wide range of music classes out of the Wesley Methodist Church Youth Centre in central Wollongong. The Conservatorium not only supported a growing Illawarra community but provided the opportunity to access high quality music tuition, particularly for students enrolled in the NSW State Conservatorium courses.

After operating for only one term the first ever concert was held on December 9th, 1972, where staff and students played a Concerto for Four Pianos.

Building on the success of its first public performance a brass ensemble was formed, and a full student symphony orchestra was funded by the IMB society, by way of a weekly payment into the bank accounts of participating students.

## CHILDHOOD MUSIC EDUCATION

With the introduction of the Suzuki method of teaching piano and violin by Hiroko Primrose in 1974, the Conservatorium saw a large injection of enrolments of young students including Richard Tognetti (now Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra) who trained under Hiroko and world-famous viola player William Primrose in his early years.

The Suzuki method of teaching music relied on the vital role played by the parent in assisting the child, and along with the Kodaly method gave rise to the pre-music literacy program, which was formally introduced

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in 1980 as the Childhood Music Education program (ChiME). To this day the ChiME program is considered one of the most successful programs in the Conservatorium's history. ChiME is so important because it ignites a lifelong passion for music among the youngest in our community.

Literally thousands of children have benefitted from this program - you are never far away from someone who has taken part in ChiME.

In 1988 the Transition Year program was developed, to provide young children with hands-on experience of a variety of instruments to establish which instrument the student was most likely to enjoy and succeed at. It remains the only program of its kind in NSW offering this type of musical assessment.

### MOVE TO KEIRAVILLE

It was during the 1980 relocation ceremony to the Gleniffer Brae Manor House in Keiraville, that the institution was officially renamed the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music, by the NSW Premier and Treasurer at the time the Honourable Mr Neville Wran.

By 1984 the Wollongong Conservatorium formally amalgamated with the University

of Wollongong and assumed the title of the Wollongong University Conservatorium of Music, working closely with the music staff at the School of Creative Arts. This new arrangement also allowed the Conservatorium to operate under the direction of a new Board of Management.

### BLUESCOPE YOUTH ORCHESTRA

The BlueScope Youth Orchestra remains the driving force for developing our local young orchestral talent into successful musicians. BlueScope's support of the Orchestra represents the longest running corporate sponsorship for the arts in Australia.

The orchestra was born out of the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music's outstanding string orchestra program of the 1980's. In 1986 BHP Steel's community donations program partnered with the Conservatorium to establish the BHP Symphony Training Orchestra.

In 1990 the Managing Director of BHP Steel formally announced that the orchestra would be known as the BHP Youth Orchestra, until 2003 when it was changed to the BlueScope Steel Youth Orchestra in line with the company's name change to BlueScope Steel. The name changed again in 2012 to the current BlueScope Youth Orchestra.

Originally conducted by Adrian Falk (1986-1988) and David Vance (1989-1995), the orchestra has had Nigel Edwards at the helm for the last 25 years.

Managed by Merrill Powell (1986-1992) and Penelope Chappell (1993-1995) in the past, our current Manager Tanya

Phillips (from 1996) who finished secondary school and joined the conservatorium 35 years ago as a teacher, has for the last 25 years been key in organising rehearsals, tours and student membership.

Under Nigel's and Tanya's leadership, along with Scott Taggart and Anthony Grimm's support as tutors, the BlueScope Youth Orchestra has toured extensively within Australia and overseas, and has won a number of awards from TOAN (The Orchestras of Australia Network). The Orchestra was awarded the prestigious National Youth Orchestral Award in 2006, for "extending the public's perception of youth orchestras". This was the first time a regional youth orchestra had received the award.

### JAZZ PROGRAM

Jazz at the Wollongong Conservatorium began with courses conducted by Nick Dooley and Jim Denley in the early eighties. In 1987 the jazz band known as University Conservatorium Show Band under conductor Don Harper, allowed prominent jazz musicians from overseas to visit and conduct workshops with the Wollongong jazz community.

However, it was with the arrival of American trumpeter Eric





Dunan in 2001 that the jazz program really flourished, in particular the school jazz program, visiting jazz artists to Wollongong and international tours of the Conservatorium's bands. Under Eric's direction, the flagship band "The Wollongong Conservatorium of Music Jazz Orchestra" achieved 1st place (AAAA division) at the Reno Jazz Festival in 2006 (USA).



contemporary, jazz and HSC theory as well as tertiary tutoring for many of our students who have continued to study music and composition at university. The Music theory program has played a vital role in positioning WollCon as an important regional centre providing opportunities for many talented musicians and composers by steering and mentoring them into their chosen career path. There is now a substantial group of alumni of emerging Australian composers who were mentored initially by John Spence at WollCon.



### MUSIC THERAPY

WollCon became an NDIS provider of Music Therapy in 2020. In Music Therapy sessions, music is used to actively support people of all ages to manage their physical and mental health and enhance their quality of life. Therapists use their training and musical ability to facilitate interactive musical experiences to help clients achieve their goals, including improved communication, cognition, physical function, mood, and social engagement. We currently are supporting over 40 clients.

### ALUMNI & STAFF

WollCon has played an important part in the education of many notable and highly successful musicians including Anthony Warlow, Richard Tognetti (ACO Director), William Hennessy (Melbourne Chamber Orchestra Director), Matthew Hindson (Sydney Conservatorium), Carolyn Watson (Leading Composer in the US), Lorraine Moxey, Andrew Sneddon, Scott Radburn (Four Kinsmen), Paul Stanhope (Sydney Conservatorium), David Piper, Nicola Crowe and the band called The Vampires.

There have been Freedman Fellowship Awards (Nick Garbett, Nicholas Russoniello

### ENSEMBLES

Besides the Conservatorium's flagship bands and orchestras (such as the BlueScope Youth Orchestra, Community Orchestra, Junior String Orchestra and Jazz Orchestra), there are a number of community ensembles for all ages and abilities that have been welcoming public participation for about 45 years.

The Curious Rendition Orchestra, the ConArtists, the Beginner Concert Band, the Five Islands String Orchestra and the community choir known as the Conchords, perform in and around Wollongong and NSW, and are driving the recent growth in community music participation in our region. For some participants it's just the start of their music career while for others their focus is just to be part of a wonderful music community.

### MUSIC THEORY & COMPOSITION

Music theory has been an important element of the education of many of our students at WollCon. We celebrate firstly the life and work of Merrill Powell who pioneered the music theory program at the Conservatorium (from 1972-2009). She was dedicated to the progress of her students and augmented her role intuitively as a wonderful mentor and guide.

In 2003, John Spence established the Digital Music Lab at WollCon and began by teaching traditional music theory. He has continued to expand the program by offering





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and Novak), Jann Rutherford Awards (Jodie Michael and Lucy Clifford), and an ABC Symphony Australia Young Performer of the Year winner (Nicholas Russoniello).

**Founding staff** and teachers from the early years include Jim Powell, Sister Lola (St Mary's Star of the Sea School) Ernest Llewellyn, Hiroko and William Primrose, Graeme Wilson (Four Kinsmen), Jan and Keith Baxter, Marie Driscoll, Merion and Merrill Powell, Nan Price, Vanessa Woodhill, Diane Waples, Daniel Herscovitch, Rotraud Schneider, Phillida Green, Nigel Edwards, Vera Troitsky and Don Harper.

As of 2021, **Long standing current staff** include: Nigel Edwards (36 years), Tanya Phillips (35 years), Janet Andrews (28 years), Eric Dunan & Ching Wen (20 years), Anthony Grimm (19 years), Susan Robinson (18 years), John Spence (18 years), Sonia Sozio (18 years) and David Rooney (12 years).

## OUR FUTURE - 'POSITIVE CHANGE THROUGH MUSIC'

The reason WollCon is so successful and about to celebrate its 50th year is because we have sustained and developed our programs and have been here to inspire every generation of young musicians.

Over 1500 students/ participants/clients work with Conservatorium teachers each week on-site. This is enhanced by over two dozen programs operating in our local schools spanning the Illawarra, the south coast and southern highlands.

Our teaching and performance programs are underpinned by our five pillars: **Creativity, Community, People and Culture, Reputation and Sustainability.**

We're committed to being a constant creative force in Wollongong and proud to be a centre of musical excellence for our region. We look forward to the next 50 years delivering **positive change through music.**

## WOLLCON DIRECTORS OVER THE YEARS

**1972-1990:** James Powell  
(first honorary principal)

**1991-1992:** Keith Hempton

**1993-1995:** Penelope Chapple  
(Senior Music Administrator)

**1996 -1997:** Acting Directors  
(Nigel Edwards, Prof Barry Conningham, John Dixon)

**1998-2001:** Claudio Pompili  
(Director)

**2001-2008:** Graham Drayton  
(Director)

**2008-2013:** Andrew Snell  
(CEO)

**2014-2020:** Joe Gaudiosi  
(CEO)

**Oct 2020 - April 2021:**  
Justin Ankus (CEO)

**2021-present:** David Francis  
(CEO)

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