

IRMTNZ Conference 2019
Southern Themes & Variations: A Joyful Celebration of Music
21 – 25 January, Dunedin

Composition, the Community, and Creative Composition

At our Conference 2019, composer Anthony Ritchie presented an illuminating session on the relationship between composers and communities. Julie Sperring was there, and found that the 'composer, performer, audience' triangle influences Anthony's own style of composing.

To put this in perspective, Anthony began by describing a very different view of the composer's role in history. He reminded us how Beethoven had paved the way from Classical to Romantic thinking, through his determination to retain his artistic freedom. Beethoven refused salaried positions and introduced new practices that put the focus on the composer, such as extended codas within works and longer concerts of his own music - platforms upon which he could express his originality and individuality. Anthony explained how this inspired composers such as Wagner and influenced the idea of the 'cult of the composer'.

Anthony then brought us back to the here and now (literally Dunedin 2019), as his compositions are generally written for real people whom he probably knows! Anthony gave an example of how, in his recent work Gallipoli to the Somme, he welcomed input from choir and orchestra members while they were rehearsing. A very moving result of this was the choir's choice to memorise a section in order to increase the impact of the music.

Christopher Small's term 'musicking' describes how composition is a shared activity designed to break down the barriers between professional and amateur. Anthony described how Small was always happy to have liberties taken with his score to help facilitate the creative process. Similarly, Anthony's father, composer John Ritchie was also considered a community composer. We heard excerpts from his delightful Three Caricatures composed specifically for a community theatre project.

Anthony has come to believe that composing with intent has always been at the heart of his work, even when, as a freelancing composer, he would accept all opportunities to compose. At that time he saw a duality between 'composing to order' and writing from his own artistic motivation. Now he believes that true musical intent was always present. He illustrated this with the example of his well-known Song, written as a request for a simple song for male voices, to words by James K Baxter. It has turned out to be one of his most performed works and re-scored as versions for mezzo and for choir. (It's very beautiful and you can listen to it [here](#)).

This was a highly interesting exploration of the role of the composer in the community and how valuable it is to build relationships that allow for artistic give and take.

Read more about Anthony and his compositions, including a new CD of choral works, Survivors, [here](#).

Julie Sperring has a background in arts management - with strong musical inclinations - having been Executive Director of SOUNZ Centre for New Zealand Music from 2010 – 2015. She enjoyed working with IRMTNZ to develop our new Communications Strategy. Since writing this article, she has developed her organisational planning consultancy [Propel Planning](#).