



Collaboration:

AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

GONDWANA CHOIRS

The collaboration involved a range of events and opportunities for musicians and choristers of the two organisations to work together in Far North Queensland inspiring each other and deepening their involvement with the community and their own arts and cultural exploration.

October 2016

THE PARTNERS



Richard Evans - Managing Director

Australia Chamber Orchestra is renowned for its inspired programming and unrivalled virtuosity, energy and individuality. Established in 1975, outstanding Australian violinist Richard Tognetti, has been at the helm of the ACO since 1989. The Orchestra performs as a symphony orchestra, chamber music ensemble and electro-acoustic collective, collaborating with an extraordinary range of artists. In 2005 the ACO introduced a national education program including a mentoring program for Australia's best young string players.

Bernie Heard – General Manager

Gondwana Choirs is the leader in Australian choral performance, creating and presenting innovative new work, and providing opportunities for training by leading artists to talented young Australians. The Choirs are comprised of the most accomplished choral groups of young people in Australia. Founded by Artistic Director Lyn Williams OAM as Sydney Children's Choir in 1989, the organisation has grown to include Gondwana National Choirs and Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choirs.



Bernie and Richard talk together about their organisations' collaboration in Far North Queensland.

How did the collaboration come about?

The ACO and Gondwana Choirs have previously collaborated over a number of artistic projects. The catalyst for this collaboration came about after the ACO was approached by Djarragun College – a college for predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Gordonvale, outside of Cairns – to assist in the development of the school's music program. The ACO knew that Gondwana Choirs already had a strong music education presence in the area through the creation and development of the successful Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir.

From this initial request, the ACO and Gondwana Choirs saw the opportunity to work together on a range of artistic and education projects, providing mentoring and support to the music teacher at Djarragun College and introducing the students of Djarragun College and the choristers of Gondwana Choirs to the music of the ACO in a range of ways. It is a rich and ongoing collaboration between the two organisations.

Why did you decide to get involved?

With both organisations working together, we were able to provide a depth of engagement for our musicians and choristers that wouldn't

otherwise be possible.

What was involved—the working process, share of risk?

The working and budget processes have been entirely collaborative. All of our activities were discussed and developed in a consultative way with each organisation covering their particular costs.

To date, activities have included the installation of ACO Virtual at the Tanks Arts Centre in Cairns which included special screenings for Djarragun College students and Gondwana choristers. The ACO Inspire Quartet (the Orchestra's dedicated education quartet) visited Cairns to present a schools' concert at Djarragun College and then took part in the weekend music camp of the Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir.

The Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir program is provided at no cost to its participants. The program of activities for the camp enabled the choristers and the members of the Quartet to get to know each other and to collaborate musically. The ACO has also enabled a local music teacher who works with the Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir to provide professional development sessions to the music teacher at Djarragun College.

In 2015, Gondwana Choirs commissioned composer Luke Byrne to create a piece working with Yidinji leader Gudjugudju (Seith Fourmile), and the ACO commissioned an arrangement of the work to include strings.





What issues arose during the process that you hadn't expected or needed to be further negotiated during the process?

None. The ACO and Gondwana Choirs had collaborated on previous occasions and Alexandra Cameron-Fraser, the ACO's Chief Operating Officer who has driven the collaboration on behalf of the Orchestra, was formerly the General Manager of Gondwana Choirs so there is a deep knowledge base regarding the people and activities involved in the collaboration.

Was it everything you hoped for?

The outcomes of this program have exceeded both organisations' expectations significantly. During the Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir weekend camp, the choristers responded incredibly well to the ACO musicians and the ACO musicians gained a great deal of experience and personal satisfaction from working with the choristers and Gondwana staff.

ACO Inspire Quartet's violinist Jenny Khafagi spoke warmly of her experience at the camp:

'The camp was one of the most inspiring and moving experiences I've ever had. We began by rehearsing with the choir. Their singing and ensemble were impeccable, and the energy of the tutors and musicians in the room was contagious!'

Lyn Williams, Gondwana Choirs Artistic Director & Founder, echoed Jenny's feelings:

'This weekend could not have been more successful. The members of the ACO Inspire Quartet not only shared their own string playing skills but enthusiastically undertook composition workshops, and even enjoyed learning Island songs and dances from the children.'

And the choristers themselves were just as enthusiastic about the weekend:

'They taught me that if you work hard you will succeed,' said one student.

Would you do it again?

The partnership between Gondwana Choirs and the ACO is ongoing, as is the ACO's work with Djarragun College. When devising community engagement and education programs, both organisations are committed to ensuring that there is provision to offer sustained engagement to the participants and communities involved.

Has it provided new avenues for future work, or new opportunities to profile your work?

The success of the collaboration at the Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir weekend camp led to an invitation by the Cairns Regional Council for the Choir and the ACO Inspire Quartet to give a combined performance at the opening of Cairns' Munro Martin Parklands this August.

The ACO and Gondwana Choirs will continue to collaborate into 2017, including another residency by the ACO Inspire Quartet at the weekend camp and a public performance by the Choir and ACO Collective (the ACO's regional touring and mentoring orchestra) in September 2017 in Cairns. For this performance, the organisations have jointly commissioned another new work for string orchestra and children's choir based on local Yidinji language and stories. The ACO will also continue to work with Djarragun College in 2017.

Has it given you understanding of new ways of working?

The ACO Inspire Quartet has developed their skills in working with young people and has learnt first-hand about the experiences, hopes and dreams of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, particularly through working with the choristers on the music composition exercise responding to Stan Grant's speech on Racism and the Australian Dream. At the camp, the choristers taught the ACO Inspire Quartet a number of traditional and contemporary Torres Strait Islander songs and dances.

The Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir choristers feel a great ownership of the ACO musicians as if they are very much "their" quartet. They have enjoyed getting to know such accomplished musicians and learning the skills required for performing with instrumental

forces. Their level of musical accomplishment and professionalism has been enhanced. Workshop and performance experiences such as these continue to expand the knowledge and skills of these young people.

Is collaboration always a good idea?

Collaboration is a good idea if both organisations share common values and each enters into the partnership with clear objectives as well as a true spirit of collaboration.

For both the ACO and Gondwana Choirs, artistic excellence and a commitment to providing high quality music education for young people who may not otherwise have the opportunity to access such education is of fundamental importance.

How do you leverage each other's audiences? Do audiences align?

The partnership has enabled the ACO to increase its engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.



The collaboration is also an important step in the development of a meaningful Reconciliation Action Plan for the ACO.

For Gondwana Choirs, the partnership allows a further level of sophistication to our choristers' musical learning, working intensively across a project which provides deep engagement.

Both organisations have included reports and photos from their collaborative activities in newsletters, programs and other communications, demonstrating our pride in this successful collaboration to a range of stakeholders.

Did the collaboration process contribute to the development of the art form?

The collaboration process has given rise to the joint commissioning of new works for string orchestra and children's choir based on Yidinji language and story. Discussions are underway for future artistic commissions, addressing an artistic need as there is very little existing repertoire for string quartet and children's choir.

Have artists improved their career pathways and development as a result of the collaboration?

Richard: The collaboration has broadened the skills and experience of the ACO Inspire Quartet musicians. This has directly and positively impacted other existing ACO programs involving young people, including the Orchestra's partnership with Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville, Victoria.

Bernie: The Gondwana choristers were truly inspired by the ACO Inspire Quartet musicians. They shared their songs and dances and were encouraged to be recognised for their talent by a professional ensemble. They are proud young Indigenous people who have strong

aspirations for tertiary education and many are now considering careers involving music.

What did you learn from working with smaller companies? Did the collaboration allow you to access innovative, interesting ideas?

Richard: The collaboration has allowed the ACO to continue to engage with the incredibly innovative and inspirational Lyn Williams, as well as with the choristers of the Cairns Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir, who are creative and inspiring young musicians in their own right.

What were the benefits and risks of collaboration for your company? How did you manage working with the more rigid schedules of MPAs?

Bernie: Collaborating with the ACO provides the artistic benefit of creating and performing with high level artists, providing an insight for our young artists into the life and discipline of a professional musician. As a medium sized arts organisation, Gondwana Choirs enjoys greater flexibility to respond to opportunities and changes quickly; however we are also restricted by our limited resources. We have enjoyed several collaborations with the ACO, and feel there is mutual respect and understanding for each organisation's strengths.