

ROBERT COSSOM

Artistic and Educational Leadership Personified



MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA'S SNARE DRUM AWARD

By Gary France



The Contestants

Percussionist, composer and instrument maker Robert Cossom has been responsible for the education of generations of Australian orchestral percussionists though his presentation of schools concerts for MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, mentoring of young people at the Australian Youth Orchestra's National Music Camps, teaching at Melbourne University and his numerous compositions and études and for "all things" percussion. During the past decade his leadership shone through his establishment and mentorship of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Snare Drum Award. This award was established by Robert Cossom in 2004 to encourage excellence in snare drum performance while providing a platform for students to practice audition and performance techniques alongside their undergraduate study within Australia and New Zealand¹. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Snare Drum Award is a part of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's Young

Artist Development Program, which encourages the pursuit of excellence in orchestral performance.

Robert Cossom, originally from Tasmania, studied percussion and drum kit with Tom O'Kelly and Eric Johnstone. He attended the Tasmanian Conservatorium, where he was awarded distinctions in composition and performance. Robert has performed with the Queensland, West Australian & Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras and is currently a member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He has appeared as soloist with the Tasmanian and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras and has given solo recitals in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Canberra.

Rob, an active composer, also mentors young composers through his position as composer-in-residence at Border Music Camp, Albury, Victoria, his compositions are regularly heard in Australia and overseas, including recent performances at the Banff Centre in Canada. His works appears in the AMEB, VCE and national tertiary education

syllabi. A proud alumnus of the Derwent Scottish Pipe Band, Robert has also addressed the Japan Percussion Society on the art of cimbalom playing²

Rob's vision has provided a re-launch for the ubiquitous snare drum. No longer the purveyor of rudimental street beats, DCI pyrotechnics and orchestral repertoire, the noble snare drum has, thanks to this insightful project, reclaimed its position on percussion recitals and public performances. Our new snare drum solo is more than likely to include, an electronic tape accompaniment or ancillary instrument such as hi hat, bass drum, suspended cymbal etc. Although these compositions can be classified as multi-percussion, this new genre of snare drum solos place, center stage, the humble snare drum as the solo voice.

The MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Snare Drum Award has been supported by Rhythmscape Publishing, Australia, one of the largest and most successful percussion music publishers in the Asia-Pacific region, representing some of Australia's leading composers. Driven by charismatic managing director, percussionist and composer Gordon Hughes, Rhythmscape has provided foundation support through publishing and making available each years commissioned solo³. Rhythmscape / MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SNARE DRUM AWARD solos include:

- 2002 Hughes Chilled Red – Alan Emslie
- 2004 Lickin' Stick - Rob Cossom
- 2005 Episodes for Snare Drum - Barry Quinn
- 2006 War Games - Robert Clarke
- 2007 Lickin' Stick - Rob Cossom (Rhythmscape Editions, 2007)
- 2008 Clockwork Lemon - Stuart Greenbaum
- 2009 Losing Your Marbles - Graham Howard
- 2010 Mashup - Benjamin McDonald
- 2011 Scotch - Alastair McKean
- 2012 The Clock Talked Loud - Rob Cossom
- 2013 Swedish Sketches - Anders Åstrand

Some of these solos incorporate a complex landscape of poly-metric and poly-rhythmic compositional devices that include motives designed to challenge the performers central core of musicality. Others may focus on the integration of electronic accompaniment presenting the opportunity for showmanship while challenging the performer to connect with the audience. Naturally each of these new generational solos contains elements of both. All solos require a prodigious technique, facile touch and sensitivity as well as the demanding an underlying core of internal pulse.

The MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SNARE DRUM AWARD also includes an assumed knowledge component. Each applicant is issued a "first round" stock standard list of orchestral excerpts (the top 10) plus, in 2013, a dash of Jacques Delécluse: Etude 1 from Keiskleiriana, etc. Participants in the MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Snare Drum Award also present their "own choice solo" and are able to source all previous competitions and, if desired, reuse former material recognizing that "practice makes perfect" is a tried and true model of preparation.

Each year the MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Snare Drum Award commissions a new work "test piece" that all competitors prepare, a complete listing of the former pieces is included in

4 FINALISTS



WINNER: Samuel Butler (SA)



Finalist: Tsoof Baras (Qld)



Finalist: Thomas von Einem (SA)



Finalist: Sam Rich (NZ)

this article. This year the MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SNARE DRUM AWARD was fortunate to have Swedish virtuoso Anders Åstrand pen the solo. This groove oriented composition thoroughly investigates the snare drum in all it's glory.

Competitors in 2013 included drummer-percussionists from Australia and New Zealand: Eleven undergraduate university percussion students were selected to take part in the exclusive opportunity which saw the winner receive a one-year mentorship with the MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA to further develop their skills.

This years competitors included: Tim Cox (Vic), Louis Sharpe (Vic), Caleb Colledge (Qld), Jamee Seeto (Qld), Lachlan Hawkins (Qld), Tsoof Baras (Qld), Zak Soenario (Qld), Jack de la Lande (SA), Samuel Butler (SA), Thomas von Einem (SA) and Sam Rich (New Zealand). Each participant performed a live audition in front of a panel of judges with four finalists being selected to take part in a free concert on Wednesday 14 August at 6:30pm in the Iwaki Auditorium, ABC Southbank Centre.

The expert panel consisted of, Robert Cossom

to round out their presentation. Anders states "In Swedish Sketches I'm combining my favorite things: jamming (inspired by American snare drum virtuoso James Campbell)' organ from Stockholm Cathedral and the improvisation of Swedish Folk tunes and Bach Inventions"⁴.

The 2013 winner Samuel Butler (SA) was awarded a one-year mentorship with the MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Percussion Section in addition to a hand crafted concert snare drum and case by Australia drum and percussion artisan Lou Mastro, a Just Percussion mallet pack, a Moody Drums and a bitsandpieces mallet and accessory table.

Our finalist Sam Rich received a beautiful Victorian ash snare drum made by Jim Moody as well as a case supplied by Revolver Drums. Finalists Thomas von Einem (SA) and Tsoof Baras (QLD) each received a Zildjian Constantinople suspended cymbal and an Evans Drumheads gift box.

Tom O'Kelly at Just Percussion generously provided, for the most deserving first year student on the day, a stick bag chock-full of mallets and sticks which this year went to Victorian drummer,



Sam Butler & Lou Mastro

(Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Percussion), Robert Clarke (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Percussion), Gary France (Associate Professor of Percussion at Australia National University) and Gordon Hughes (Managing Director, Rhythmscape Publishers).

The day kicked off early with each competitor being assigned a 20-minute spot to strut their respective stuff, with each participant presenting a prescribed set of orchestral excerpts. Time is allotted for setting up, balancing and creating a comfortable environment for each person.

At 6:30pm the 2013 Finalists' Concert and award presentation took place at the Iwaki Auditorium, ABC studios ABC Southbank Centre. With an audience of 100+ guests and supporters our four finalists': Tsoof Baras (Qld), Samuel Butler (SA), Thomas von Einem (SA) and Sam Rich (New Zealand) launched into the world premiere of Swedish Sketches by Anders Åstrand as well as performing their their "own choice" selection

Tim Cox.

The Melbourne Symphony Snare Drum Award was generously supported by Robert Cossom, Lyn, Tim and Kris Edward, Mastro Snare Drums, Moody Drums, bitsandpieces, Just Percussion, Evans Drumheads, Zildjian Cymbals, and Rhythmscape Publishing Australia.

For information on Robert Cossom and the 2014 Melbourne Symphony Snare Drum Award check in at [http://www.Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.com.au/education/young-artists-programmes/snare-drum-award/](http://www.MelbourneSymphonyOrchestra.com.au/education/young-artists-programmes/snare-drum-award/) (Endnotes)

- 1 MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Snare Drum Award program 14, August 2013.
- 2 [http://www.Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.com.au/about-us/the-orchestra/robert-cossom/](http://www.MelbourneSymphonyOrchestra.com.au/about-us/the-orchestra/robert-cossom/)
- 3 <http://www.rhythmscape.com.au/home.php?cat=50>
- 4 program note: MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA Snare Drum Award