



## Meet Graeme Widmer

"I come from a long line of musicians, beginning perhaps most notably in the Australian context with my great grandfather who arrived in Australia from Switzerland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century having left the priesthood. He was to be a music master at St Joseph's College for 50 years. Each subsequent generation, on both sides of the family, has had many enthusiastic and involved musicians.

When I arrived at high school I thought I should graduate from the side drum and seem to recall having the clarinet in mind. However, the music teacher who was emptying the storeroom noted my larger than average frame and said "you're a big boy you can learn the bassoon." I don't recall any mention of the expense, the ridiculous fingering or the endless trauma associated with the double reed. But apparently I did as I was told, and have been doing so ever since.

With hindsight she did me an enormous favour, as I now spend a significant part of most weekends rehearsing or performing. It seems that the bassoon is more than a passing interest.

The relative undersupply of "keen amateur" bassoonists also ensures ongoing demand, and as a result I have played with most of the amateur orchestras in Sydney and several musical societies. My association with the KPO has been the most rewarding, as it is a wonderful organization with inspired musical direction and leadership, and a repertoire which is endlessly challenging and rewarding.

I sometimes ponder which performances have left the greatest impression on me. It is usually the combination of music and architecture that comes to mind - specifically, *Mahler 2* in the Sydney Town

Hall and *Messiah* in St Andrews Cathedral. The combination of great music and architecture certainly leaves an indelible impression.

Oh the Contra? They are certainly rare beasts. I own one of three in private captivity in Sydney. Most bassoonists, sometime in their career, aspire to play the contra bassoon... or perhaps wish to impersonate the pedals of an organ...but they do appreciate that - as the foundation of the wind section - the significance of the contra is often underrated.

Having only recently acquired this instrument, I find myself revisiting old challenges - remember the double reed, and the ridiculous fingering... but, at the same time, I have the great satisfaction of being the lowest instrument in the orchestra!

To "fill in the day", I teach Design and Technology at James Ruse Agricultural High School. This provides a nice contrast to bassoon playing. Crossover has not always been avoided because, for a number of years, I coached a wind ensemble at the school through to performance at the Opera House for a combined high schools concert...and I was even conned - in a moment of weakness - to building a harpsichord for the school.

Often leading up to performances, and even during, I wonder why I am voluntarily inflicting such pressure on myself. But it seems that the opportunity to be part of a performance of some of the greatest musical works is completely seductive."

### **BUILD YOUR OWN HARPSICHORD!**

Building a harpsichord provided completely different challenges to those I had previously experienced when building - or pulling things apart. This instrument had to produce quality music...but had to look and sound as if it was built several centuries ago.

Harpsichords have an incredibly simple and crude mechanism. Yet it still took me several hundred hours over a period of about two years to build, set up and adjust - even though my starting point was a very basic American-supplied kit (which was a good deal more detailed than a model kit!), which was copy of a Flemish-style instrument.

Ultimately it was highly satisfying for me when music was forthcoming.

The project must have been successful. The harpsichord is regularly used at school to accompany string groups, and has been borrowed by several orchestras, including the KPO for last year's Rotary *Popular Classics* concert... but its sound always reminds me of Sir Bernard Heinze's famous observation that "a harpsichord sounds like two skeletons copulating on a tin roof."



Photo: Christopher Hayles

## Meet Anne Marie Braid

Anne Marie Braid has been a member of the KPO for 23 years. Throughout this time she has also filled the demanding role of Concertmaster or Leader of Orchestra, a position she currently shares with violinists Margaret Howard and Heloise Pyne.

“My interest in music began from an early age, listening to my father and friends play chamber music. I was very keen to learn the piano, so at the age of eight I began learning from a teacher at school.

Several years later, at the end of my last year of primary school, my father died. He had collected a number of instruments over the years and my mother suggested that I may like to try the violin.

I learned violin and piano from a teacher at my Hobart school, Sister Martha, whose method combined an interesting mix of technique and eccentricity. She taught piano as well as all the stringed instruments, including the harp!

Our school was very close to the Conservatorium and occasionally Sister Martha's students would attend master classes hosted by the various string teachers.

I joined the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra and took part in the various tours and camps that were offered. I can remember travelling to Melbourne (a large city by Tasmanian standards!) and playing a piece by Nigel Butterley in the Dallas Brookes Hall. One of our biggest ventures was a tour to New Zealand in September 1973.

In the later years of high school I attended the Annual String Summer School in Hobart. This was very popular with many teachers from the mainland and New Zealand, and it was here that I became aware of some of Australia's prominent teachers - including Elizabeth Morgan, John Curro, Keith Crellin and Sela Trau.

On finishing school I enrolled at the Conservatorium and studied violin with Lyndal Edmiston and Jan Sedivka, and piano with Peter Clarken. After completing my performance and teaching studies I moved to Brisbane to play with the Queensland Theatre Orchestra under the direction of Georg Tintner. The QTO was a small chamber orchestra that played mainly Baroque and early Classical repertoire. It also performed with the Queensland Ballet and Opera companies, and was used as a source of players for a wide variety of concerts, recordings and shows.

I met Barbara Cran (violinist with KPO) through her daughter, Lucinda, who was a bassoonist with QTO. On one occasion both Lucinda and I were travelling to Sydney and she kindly offered me transport from the airport to the city with her parents. This trip convinced me that Lucinda's father, John (now a member of KPO's Concerto Competition Committee &, occasionally, a bassoonist with the KPO), must be a car rally driver – little did I know that he was actually the Principal Bassoon with the SSO!

In 1983 I moved to Sydney - to marry my husband, who was also a Tasmanian and then working in Sydney. Barbara pointed me in the direction of possible violin teaching work at Abbotsleigh, PLC and Barker...and she suggested I join the KPO.

I enjoy reading and movies, and am still raising a family (one son is in 3<sup>rd</sup> year university, the other is preparing for HSC exams this year)...but my main interest is music. I am lucky that it is both my job - I have been teaching violin at SCECGS Redlands at Cremorne for 17 years - and my hobby. Orchestral repertoire is my particular passion.

KPO has provided the opportunity to forge some wonderful friendships and to share the experience of playing great music with other enthusiasts. One of the most memorable concerts for me was Henryk's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert, when we played Tchaikovsky's Fifth. The degree of musicality and sense of ensemble in this performance provided a measure of the best that KPO can achieve.

I find the KPO provides me with the motivation to practice, and a fantastic opportunity to learn the orchestral repertoire – for which I'm grateful. And when leading the orchestra I find I am even more motivated, because you must ensure you cover all the material to the very best of your ability...when you're sitting up front, there's no way you can hide!”