



MEDIA RELEASE

24 February 2009

IN THE CHAIR: THE GODFATHER OF MUSIC COMPOSITION

In a momentous development for the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the doyen of music composition, Emeritus Professor **Peter Sculthorpe**, has agreed to endow Australia's first Chair of Australian Music.

The multi-million dollar endowment will nurture generations of future young composers from Australia and overseas as part of the legacy of Australia's most prolific and esteemed composer.

"The Con is in very good hands and I feel very comfortable and confident to bequest this new Chair at a time when music composition is making headway with younger generations," said Mr Sculthorpe, who turns 80 in April.

"My association with The Con goes way back. In fact, I have been associated with every Director since Eugene Goossens in the 1950s.

"Little did I know back then that the conservatorium would reach the heights it has today where it is regarded as one of the top ten music institutions in the world.

"Given that we have Chairs of Australian Literature, the question I asked myself was 'why not a Chair of Australian Music.' It is a logical, timely and obvious move. And it was imperative that it be at Sydney's Conservatorium."

Mr Sculthorpe was awarded an MBE in 1970, and OBE in 1977 and an Order of Australia in 1990. He is one of Australia's Living National Treasures.

More than 300 of his self-penned manuscript scores are held in a special collection at the National Library.

He said he believed the new Chair should retain a "flexible and fluid approach" to Australian music.

"There definitely should be some emphasis on Australasian and Pacific regions, but it is also important that coming generations have the opportunity to experiment and reach out to all manner of influences."

The Dean and Principle of The Con, Professor **Kim Walker**, described the endowment as a "massive and marvellous breakthrough."

"I know Peter has been contemplating the need, and his desire for, such a Chair for many years. I am tickled pink that he has chosen now to make it happen...it offers so many opportunities and will help lift The Con to even greater heights.

"As the recognised Godfather of music composition, this proposed bequest adds to his deep, rich and universally renowned contribution."

Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts, **Virginia Judge**, welcomed the news on behalf of the Government.

"Peter is already immortal in Australian music. I am delighted that his incalculable contribution to our cultural life will live on through this gift.



“The creation of this new Chair charges The Con to continue to build on its tradition of excellence, and consolidates The Con’s position as one of the world’s leading centres of music education and scholarship.”

Professor **Anne Boyd**, the first Australian and the first woman to be appointed Professor of Music at the University of Sydney, praised the endowment as “an act of extraordinary generosity.”

“This will be the first named Chair of Australian Music in any University and signifies a special coming of age in our nation’s musical and cultural life,” she said.

“It will ensure in a very special and exciting way that creativity, research and teaching in Australian music will continue to flourish and to hold a very significant place in Australia’s first University and its Faculty of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

“In the process of articulating a musical identity for himself and for our nation, Peter Sculthorpe’s deeply original contribution to music in Australia is of towering and international significance.

“His work as composer and as a teacher largely situated within the University of Sydney (since 1963) has had an extraordinary influence on several generations of musicians,” said Professor Boyd, who is Pro-Dean (Academic) at The Con.

Mr Sculthorpe is currently revisiting songs he wrote 50 years ago to be part of the opening concert of the Canberra Festival in May.

His Opera, Rites of Passage (1973), performed in a concert version, will be another hallmark of the Festival.

The establishment of the new Chair is subject to the approval of the Senate of the University of Sydney.

Media inquiries to Scott Saunders, at The Con, on 02 9351 1298, or Graham Cassidy, Cato Counsel, 0419 202317

MEDIA PLEASE NOTE:

The new Chair will be announced tonight by Peter Sculthorpe himself, in the company of the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency Marie Bashir AC CVO, at the Dean’s Gala at The Con, Macquarie Street, at 6pm