THE SYMPHONY IN AUSTRALIA, 1960–2020

Rhoderick McNeill
The Symphony in Australia, 1960–2020

The Symphony remained a major orchestral form in Australia between 1960 and 2020, with a body of diverse and interesting symphonies produced during the 1960s and 1970s that defied the widespread modernist trends of serialism, electronic music and indeterminism that seemed harbingers of the symphony’s demise. From the late 1970s onwards, many Australian composers chose to work in styles that admitted modal and tonal melodic and harmonic elements with regular pulse. Major cycles of symphonies by Carl Vine, Brenton Broadstock and Ross Edwards began to appear in the late 1980s. Other prolific symphonists like Paul Paviour (10 symphonies), David Morgan (15 symphonies), Philip Bracanin (11), Peter Tahourdin (5), John Polglase (5) and many others demonstrated a revived interest in the form. This trend continued into the first two decades of the present century with symphonies by Matthew Hindson, Katy Abbott, Stuart Greenbaum, Andrew Schultz, Mark Isaacs and Gordon Kerry. This renewed interest in the symphony reflects similar trends in Britain and the United States. Rhoderick McNeill provides a comprehensive introduction to this large body of music with the aim of making the music and its composers known to concertgoers, music educators and students, conductors and music entrepreneurs.

Professor Rhoderick McNeill is an Honorary Professor in the School of Creative Arts, University of Southern Queensland, Australia.
The Symphony in Australia, 1960–2020

Rhoderick McNeill
Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

1 Definitions and International Context 1960–2020 5


4 1980–1995: New Directions in Australian Symphonic Style 71

5 Three Symphonists: Brenton Broadstock, Ross Edwards and Carl Vine 102

6 1995–2020 – The ‘Elders’ 163

7 Symphonies of the ‘Fifties’ Generation (1990–2020) 189


List of Australian Symphonies 1960–2020 (Arranged in Alphabetical Order According to Composer) 243

Bibliography 256

Index 261
Acknowledgements

Many contributors have assisted the author. Primary acknowledgement is made to the composers who have made time available for interviews, electronic conversations and correspondence and for making their scores and private recordings available for study. They include Katy Abbott, Jodie Blackshaw, Philip Bračanin, Brenton Broadstock, Ann Carr-Boyd, Barry Conyngham, Paul Dean, George Dreyfus, Ross Edwards, Andrew Ford, Stuart Greenbaum, Matthew Hindson, Mark Isaacs, David Joseph, Elena Kats-Chernin, Don Kay, Gordon Kerry, David Morgan, Paul Paviour, John Polglase, Edward Primrose, John Rotar, Andrew Schultz, Larry Sitsky, Carl Vine and Felix Werder. My thanks to British composers David Matthews, John Pickard, Philip Sawyers and Matthew Taylor, to New Zealand composer Anthony Richie and US composer Jack Gallagher who provided information concerning Chapter 1. Other academics provided assistance of various kinds: John Whiteoak sourced a recording and program notes of Keith Humble’s *A Symphony (of Sorrows)*; Victoria Lakemann graciously shared her PhD thesis material on Ross Edwards and a recording of Symphony No.5. Carolyn Philpott provided valuable assistance concerning both Malcolm Williamson and Don Kay.

My deep gratitude to Judith Foster and the staff of the Australian Music Centre Library for their assistance in making the remarkable resource of scores, recordings and associated materials of the centre accessible and for their regular help. The Australian Music Centre manages the majority of the full scores discussed in this book, which are available for purchase and, for AMC members, for electronic or hard copy library loans. The National Library of Australia provided access to Lovelock’s Symphony in C sharp minor and granted permission for reproduction of an example from Keith Humble’s *A Symphony (of Sorrows)*. The State Library of Victoria provided access to scores of the Le Gallienne and Douglas symphonies. The Rare Books section of the University of Melbourne Music Library provided copies of the Malcolm Williamson Symphony No.6 score and James Penberthy’s Symphony No.8. Wirripang Press graciously provided scores of two Paul Paviour symphonies. Geoff Rosbrook of Queensland Youth Orchestra assisted with inquiries associated with John Rotar and Larry Sitsky.
I am grateful to all of the composers who provided permission to use musical examples of their work in the text. Faber Music provided permission for the reproduction of musical examples of their ‘house’ composers Carl Vine, Matthew Hindson and Roger Smalley. Wise Music through their Australian partner organisation Hal Leonard Australia provided permission for the music examples from the Carl Vine Symphonies 1–4 (originally published by Chester).

The following family members and copyright holders of deceased composers provided permission to the author to include musical examples: Lynne Douglas, Julia and Sarah Tahourdin (who also provided permission to obtain archive recordings of Peter Tahourdin’s Symphonies Nos.3 and 4), Alex Lovelock and David Smalley. Ilse Friedl of Vienna provided permission for the musical examples of Eric Gross. Simon Campion provided assistance and permission for the two Malcolm Williamson examples.

Brenton Broadstock, Gordon Kerry and David Symons of the University of Western Australia provided advice at various stages of the work on this book. Both Brenton and Gordon read through the text and Gordon provided detailed feedback for consideration. Ross Edwards read through the sections pertaining to his music for ‘fact-checking’.

The University of Southern Queensland allocated development leave in the first half of 2019 to facilitate the initial research and writing. I am grateful to my Humanities and Creative Arts colleagues for their encouragement and collegiality. None of this work would be possible without the daily support of Lesley throughout our 40 years of marriage. I dedicate this book to her and my adult children Allan and Miriam.
The Symphony in Australia, 1960–2020 presents an historical and analytical overview of symphonies composed in Australia since 1960. It forms a sequel to the author’s The Australian Symphony from Federation to 1960 (Ashgate/Routledge, 2014).

Why a book about the symphony in Australia? Since 1960, over 130 symphonies for full orchestra have been composed by a large body of Australian composers. They include many fine works which deserve places within the regular live performance and recorded repertoire of Australian and international orchestras. This book is the first to survey and analyse this significant body of work and includes extensive coverage of symphonies composed in Australia during the first two decades of the present century. It demonstrates that the ‘grand genre’ of orchestral music has had greater prominence in Australian concert music than apparent in previously published accounts of Australian music history.

Gordon Kerry’s New Classical Music: Composing Australia is the most recent general survey of late twentieth-century Australian classical music. In Chapter 8, Kerry discusses the ‘comeback’ of the symphony in relation to Carl Vine, Ross Edwards and Brenton Broadstock but owing to limited space did not encompass the breadth of the interest in the symphony from a much wider range of Australian composers.

David Bennett’s Sounding Postmodernism surveys and discusses the theories of postmodernism and their applicability to concert music generally, then presents the responses of 36 Australian composers, sound-artists and music critics to a series of questions that circle around the issues of modernism and postmodernism. In total, 11 of the responders have composed symphonies, but this matter is not raised as a primary concern of the interviews nor is the symphony considered as a signifier (or not) of postmodern practice in Bennett’s chapters.

Michael Hooper’s Australian Music and Modernism, 1960–1975 reassesses the period with specific reference to selected works by Don Banks, Richard Meale, Peter Sculthorpe and Nigel Butterley. Hooper distils the essence of what it meant to be a modernist composer in Australia with
reference to the key composers, contemporary music critics and academic commentators and posits clear boundaries to the emergence and dissipation of the ‘movement’. The composers in question did not write symphonies during this period (Meale and Butterley did much later). His focus on a few leading figures did not permit Hooper to examine the music of other prominent modernist composers like Felix Werder or George Dreyfus who composed symphonies during the 1960s and 1970s, or Keith Humble or Larry Sitsky who composed symphonies much later during the 1990s and early 2000s.

A new edition of Roger Covell’s pioneering 1967 study, Australia’s Music: Themes of a New Society, included a brief postscript presenting the author’s perspective on musical trends since 1967. There is passing reference to Vine and Edwards’s symphonies but no comment on the revival of the symphony.

Individual symphonies and treatments of Malcolm Williamson, Ross Edwards, Brenton Broadstock and Carl Vine have been the subjects of post-graduate theses. Published books include short sections on James Penberthy’s Symphony No.6 ‘Earth Mother’, Roger Smalley’s Symphony, Richard Meale’s Symphony, Nigel Butterley’s Symphony and From Sorrowing Earth, Williamson’s Australian-themed symphonies and the present author’s chapter on the symphonies of Carl Vine. However, prior to this book, there has not been a cumulative and comprehensive survey of the surprisingly large number of symphonies composed in Australia since 1960.

Real people and their creative works rarely fit comfortably within tidy categories or neatly framed stylistic boxes, especially given the relatively recent provenance of the symphonies. The picture is complicated by long-lived and prolific composers like David Morgan and Paul Paviour who have created and revised symphonies across the whole time-span of this book (and earlier). They confound a clear chronological sequence of generational symphonic development or neat delineation of modernism and postmodernism as do other senior composers like Larry Sitsky and Don Kay who have come to the symphony late in life.

The Symphony in Australia, 1960–2020 focuses on the work of composers who have contributed directly to the Australian musical environment. Thus, British-born composers like Roger Smalley or Peter Tahourdin who became resident or took up citizenship in Australia are considered but the Australian-born expatriate Malcolm Williamson who spent the majority of his working life in Britain is featured less prominently. Williamson’s experience as a leading composer in Britain, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, was very different to composers who worked within the local limitations of music education and performance opportunities available within the much smaller and spread-out Australian population base; conditions which may have frustrated the development of Williamson’s career had he based himself there. Although there are three symphonies
with Australian themes, which were performed in Australia, they have not taken root there.

Works bearing the title ‘Symphony’ (Nigel Butterley’s *From Sorrowing Earth* the only notable exception) and composed for orchestras that include strings form the primary focus. Encompassing all of the worthy, large-scale orchestral works bearing illustrative titles which are symphonic in nature, or works entitled ‘Symphony’ or ‘Chamber Symphony’ for large chamber ensembles would require a much larger project. Such exclusions should provide grist for the mill for future researchers.

Chapter 1 considers the definitions of ‘symphonism’ within the international context of the period 1960–2020. Chapters 2 and 3 focuses on Australian symphonies composed during the 1960s and 1970s, first with a survey of the ongoing contribution of established senior composers and somewhat younger composers who worked in tonal styles. Symphonies of composers born during the 1920s and 1930s which cover neo-classic as well as serial and post-scalar styles form the focus of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 considers the ‘watershed’ period of the 1980s which triggered an outpouring of symphonies from the mid-1980s onwards. This period coincides with the emergence of neo-romanticism and the reintroduction of tonal and modal styles, sometimes by composers previously considered ‘modernist’. The comparatively well-known symphonies of Carl Vine, Ross Edwards and Brenton Broadstock are considered in chronological order in Chapter 5. As 15 of these 19 symphonies are readily available in both scores and recordings the treatment is more extensive. Chapters 6–8 explore symphonies composed in Australia since the late 1990s and the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Chapter 6 examines the symphonies of senior Australian composers David Morgan, Paul Paviour, Don Kay, Larry Sitsky, Philip Bračanin, Barry Conyngham and Richard Mills. Chapter 7 focuses on the symphonies of a cluster of composers born between 1957 and 1961. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the symphonies of composers born from 1966 through to the 1990s including Stuart Greenbaum, Matthew Hindson and Katy Abbott. An annotated list of the symphonies covered in this book forms an appendix.

Notes

3 David Bennett, *Sounding Postmodernism* (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 2008).
4 Introduction

7 Christopher Mark, *Roger Smalley: A Case Study of Late Twentieth-Century Composition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
The symphony’s survival and adaptation during the second half of the twentieth century and into the first decades of this century is a remarkable phenomenon in contemporary orchestral concert music, but one that has received comparatively little attention. What has the word ‘symphony’ meant for composers and musicologists since 1960? Why is it that composers and audiences continue to be attracted by this grandest of all large ensemble forms in Europe, America and Australia?

Definitions
The idea of ‘symphony’ changed considerably during the twentieth century. At least until mid-century, ‘symphonism’ or ‘being symphonic’ was linked, both historically and practically, with sonata-form structural procedures in one or more movements, endemic to the symphony since the mid-eighteenth century. Once these processes had been systematised within the early nineteenth century formulations of ‘text-book’ or standard sonata form, they formed the basis for elaboration and variation throughout the nineteenth century – described by James Hepokoski as sonata deformations. Such sonata-based approaches to form were at the heart of the definition of a symphony – a sonata for orchestra – right through the symphonies of Mahler, Shostakovich in Symphonies 5–10 or Vaughan Williams’s Symphonies 1–6.

A fundamental shift in the development of the symphony during the twentieth century occurred when composers like Sibelius (in his later Symphonies No.4–7) and Nielsen (in Symphony No.5) chose to depart significantly from the sonata paradigm and seek out new ways of being symphonic. Hepokoski writes of Sibelius’s challenges:

Symphonic form was now to be brought back to its first principles. It was to be reconstituted from the ground floor up. Consequently, after the Fourth Symphony … Sibelius concentrated on the problem of recreating ‘form’ on a more elemental level. This meant striving to create ad hoc musical structures that would be supported less by the horizon
of expectations provided by the Formenlehre\textsuperscript{4} tradition than by the idiosyncratic, quasi-intuitive inner logic of the selected musical materials.\textsuperscript{5}

Another tendency was to synthesise the multi-movement symphony into one-movement forms (or with Nielsen\textsuperscript{5}, two-movement forms) that accommodated several types of speed and character (i.e. scherzo or slow movement) in a continuous span of music. This could be done via ‘add-ins’ into an overarching sonata movement, like that shown in Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony No.1 or Franz Schmidt’s Symphony No.4 or by completely departing from sonata-form norms as evident, for instance, in Sibelius’s Symphony No.7 and then later one-movement symphonies like Roy Harris’s Symphony No.3 or Samuel Barber’s Symphony No.1.

Amongst the symphonies composed by Australians between 1960 and 2020 a number of different approaches to the problem of ‘being symphonic’ will appear. Sonata-form approaches continue to be found in almost every decade since 1960, with the latest examples including Andrew Schultz’s Symphony No.3, Mark Isaac’s two symphonies, Philip Brâcanin’s Symphonies 5–11 and Symphony No.2 by Matthew Dewey, all dating from 2013 and after. A mixture of sonata and Lisztian synthesis of different movement types appears in Eric Gross’s Symphony No.1, William Lovelock’s Symphony in C sharp minor and John Polglase’s Symphony No.2. Other key composers like Ross Edwards, Brenton Broadstock and Carl Vine have found their own, different ways of being symphonic in both multi-movement and single-movement approaches. So, if sonata procedures are no longer endemic to the symphony, what does the term mean?

In his recent survey, Jeffrey Langford asks, ‘What does it mean when a composer attaches the title “symphony” to a large orchestral work’? Drawing attention to Ligeti, Messiaen and Lutoslawski he asks,

Why are some of these (such as Atmosphères, Chronochromie, or Venetian Games) not called a symphony, while other works by the same composers [apparently not Ligeti]…do take the title ‘symphony’? What is the distinction these composers were trying to make between orchestral works that are symphonies, and those that are not?\textsuperscript{6}

Langford states that there are no easy answers to his important questions and, unfortunately, does not offer any. His own definition of symphony:

that is broadly inclusive of everything written through the middle of the 20th century: ‘a large-scale work for orchestra, usually in multiple movements or sections of contrasting tempo, metre, and key, which also demonstrates some kind of connection stretching across the whole work’. Implied in this basic definition is the requirement that the various parts of a symphony make a unified whole that is more than just a collection of its parts.\textsuperscript{7}
Daniel Grimley’s discussion of form in the twentieth-century symphonies states:

To a greater extent than almost any other musical genre, symphonies are concerned explicitly with the musical representation of time and space. A simple etymology of the word points towards this preoccupation—the idea of 'sounding together' implies both the projection of sounds in/through space and the simultaneity of their presentation. Beyond a work’s linear unfolding through time in performance, it is this sense of bringing things together which helps to shape and colour the symphony’s particular structural and expressive tensions. Yet the single defining feature of the twentieth-century symphony is the extent to which their categories of time and space have become increasingly contested and contingent.8

Hans Keller’s definition of the symphony as the ‘large-scale integration of contrasts’9 has been influential and has assisted a number of Australian and British composers in their own understanding of the genre.10 Keller’s 1978 critical response to Peter Maxwell Davies’s Symphony saw the work as evidence of our age’s ‘crisis of symphonism’. Edward Venn paraphrased Keller’s observation that the “'definition and large-scale integration of the contrast between statements and developments” best define symphonic thought, irrespective of the precise forms or instrumentation that are employed.11 Symphonist David Matthews mentioned another Keller dictum which had been important to him: that the richest kind of musical experience is provided by ‘the meaningful contradiction of expectation’, and then illustrated the point by examples of sonata-form like expectations that he had subverted in the finale of his Symphony No.4.12

British composer Robert Simpson was more specific. He posited that a ‘true’ symphony should include:

1. The fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole...
2. The continuous control of pace...
3. The reserves of strength necessary to achieve (1) and (2) are such as to express size.
4. …the dynamic treatment of tonality...
5. …it is active in all possible ways. That is to say that in creating it the composer must never allow any prime element of the music (rhythm, melody, harmony, tonality) to seem to die, so that artificial respiration becomes necessary.13

In the light of his definition, Simpson was hesitant to include Stravinsky and Hindemith in his edited collection of essays (see his introduction to Volume 2) and considered Keller’s definition to be insufficient.14 British
composer John Pickard commented helpfully on the Keller/Simpson definitions:

I’ve always thought that Hans Keller’s definition is a very good one. I knew Bob Simpson very well and in my early career was very much an adherent of his thinking. But my position has shifted over the years away from what I now see as the inflexibility of his position... I also find his emphasis on tonal drama to be limiting and, in certain cases, fanciful. My fundamental position is that ‘the symphony’ is not a form; it is a way of thinking about music as a whole. One can come at it from the historical angle (Tippett’s definition of the symphony as ‘an archetype’) or from a technical one (e.g. the idea of symphonic thought having a certain kind of motion, which is an attractive concept to me). I definitely don’t think that you have to write Symphonies in order to be symphonic... which leads to another Kellerism: that the string quartet is more symphonic than the symphony.15

Preston Stedman avoids any hard and fast definitions of the symphony in the hands of twentieth-century composers. He is content to allow composers to call their orchestral pieces symphonies if that is what they think they are: ‘Since theory always follows practice, it will be the approach of this text to include all such works in hopes of, in the years ahead, developing a broader definition of the symphony’.16

There are possible factors of prestige, musical weight and ‘claim to mastery’ that attract (or repel) the choice of the title ‘Symphony’ for an orchestral work. The alleged and oft-cited conversation between Mahler and Sibelius concerning the nature of the symphony certainly underlines this; the notion that the symphony must encompass the world, or impress by its ‘severity of style and its profound logic’ suggests a form of high status. Julian Horton sees the flexibility and adaptability of the symphony sustained by ‘... the genre’s aesthetic prestige: the symphony continues to attract composers even as the idioms and musical systems from which it arose slip from universal usage, because symphonic mastery still confers technical legitimacy’.17

Alongside such concerns sits the awesome accretion of tradition associated with the great symphonists of the past: particularly the Austro-German tradition of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler. Such concerns have not proved to be obstacles for a significant number of composers in most concert-music countries since the mid-1970s. They have used the term ‘symphony’ and thus aligned themselves in some way with the tradition even though, formally, the traditional characteristics of a symphony (as articulated by Simpson) may be absent and the word used with considerable freedom. Others may conform with Keller or Simpson’s strong parameters of what it means to be symphonic. In practice, the pluralist aesthetic environment in contemporary orchestral music allows a composer the freedom to use the title ‘Symphony’ as they see fit. There are also many
composers who purposely avoid it. For instance, US/Australian composer Douglas Knehans was asked why he didn’t use the title ‘Symphony’ in his orchestral work Unfinished Earth. He said,

There is something about our society, culturally, that if you say Symphony, there are some strong connotations with it. People might think ‘…this guy thinks he is Beethoven or something’, so this word triggers a lot of connotations. ‘Concerto’ does it too; ‘Sonata’ as well. All these words are loaded in a hyper-saturated traditional way. Although I think that way – I think very symphonically when I think of orchestral music – I don’t want people to pigeon-hole the music before they have heard it by using those words.18

Beata Bolesławska summarises a number of perspectives concerning the nature of the symphony and of its significant impact on post-1950s Polish musical life.

The important role of the symphony was stressed by Mieczysław Tamaszewski in his essay devoted to the Polish symphony in the years 1944–94. According to him…the symphony became an important and representative genre because “if one talks about Lutosławski’s Third, Palester’s Fifth, Penderecki’s Second, about Górecki’s Symphony of Sorrowful Songs or Panufnik’s Sinfonia Sacra, it is clear that it concerns pieces of particular weight and significance”. The similar view of the symphony seemed to be confirmed by the composers themselves, including Krzysztof Penderecki (b.1933 [-2020]), who according to his own essays in the genre – stated that he turned to the symphony ‘in order to absorb and process the experience of our century’ and saw the genre as ‘that musical ark which would make it possible to convey to coming generations what is best in our twentieth-century tradition of the composing of sounds’.19

In 1983, Christopher Ballantine presented the first extended book that examined how ‘being symphonic’ was explored in symphonies of the twentieth century. At the core of the symphony is ‘a concern for dualism and its musical exploration as the essential preoccupation of symphonic composition’.20 In the latter part of the book, he outlined how composers maintained dualism through means other than classical tonality and theme during the twentieth century. However, only a few of his examples are symphonies in which tonality or classical thematic contrasts are absent or irrelevant.21 His book predated the re-emergence of tonal factors in mainstream concert music and he did not discuss any developments in symphonic writing occurring after 1965.

David Fanning highlights the ‘community-building power’ of the symphony, or its ethical dimension, citing Paul Bekker’s 1918 survey of the
Definitions and International Context

symphony in the wake of Mahler’s death. Bekker’s essay was highly influential in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s and undergirded the state-aligned principles of symphonic composition. In addition to the technical characteristics of symphonism as outlined by Simpson, Fanning states that the imperatives of twentieth-century symphonism ‘have to do with mapping the expressive range of the post-Beethovenian symphony onto large existential issues, often by means of grand-scale dualisms such as good/evil, life/death, light/dark, movement/stasis, mental/physical, old/new’. The capacity to encompass both the technical and community-building aspects of the symphony seems to be determinative of the canonical success of a work, or otherwise in an environment in which several thousand twentieth-century symphonies have been recorded. ‘Debates over unjustified neglect…cannot get very far without taking this aspirational aspect into account, at least as much as style, structure and craftsmanship’.

Discussions about the nature and definition of symphonism in Australia have been rare in published scholarly literature prior to the present author’s research. In marked contrast to the discourse about the nature of the symphony in Britain, Australian symphonic composition has occurred with little public theoretical reflection. Perhaps the only example is the discussion between Melbourne composers Peter Tahourdin and Brenton Broadstock just prior to the 1989 premieres of their Symphony No.4 and Symphony No.2, respectively. Tahourdin described the symphony as ‘the most direct way of writing for the orchestra…a large-scale orchestral piece…more concerned with abstract notions, with philosophical notions and with purely musical ideas’. Broadstock said that

to me the symphony has always been associated with a musical work which is profound, which wants to make some sort of statement. And it’s also a form, particularly in the twentieth century I think, which is very adaptable, very flexible and unlike the traditional symphonic form.

How Australian composers have interpreted the notions of symphonism and formal structures within it forms a major theme within the following chapters.

Alongside the issues of defining the symphony in the twentieth century, there is the fascinating phenomenon of the symphony flourishing in countries outside of Germany/Austria. In 1900, symphonic music by German-speaking composers held hegemony over concert music repertories. Since the death of Mahler, the geographical centres of symphonic composition shifted from Germany and Austria to Scandinavia, Britain, Russia and the USA or in the words of David Matthews, ‘the symphony’s centre of gravity had moved north’. By the 1950s, one could include Poland and the Baltic states in the symphonic orbit. With some exceptions, including the
Definitions and International Context  11

symphonies of Schmidt, Hindemith, Weill, Hartmann and Henze, Germany was no longer preeminent.

Notwithstanding, recent concert programs of English-speaking orchestras continue to focus on the Austro-Germanic symphonic repertoire from Haydn to Mahler, with the addition of Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Sibelius and Shostakovich. Live concert performances of many of the works discussed later in this chapter are comparatively rare (and repeat performances even more so), and thus also radio broadcasts of such concerts. It is difficult for contemporary symphonies to enter the public imagination without such exposure. Sympathetic conductors and orchestral management are critically important to this end. In Australia, prior to the early 1990s, conductors like John Hopkins, Joseph Post, Henry Krips, Patrick Thomas and Stuart Challender were key figures in promoting and maintaining performances of Australian works, including symphonies. Indeed, Challender was instrumental in promoting the early performances and recordings of Carl Vine’s Symphonies 1–3, thus helping to establish the composer as a prominent symphonist (see Chapter 5). 29

Alongside live concerts and broadcasts, professional digital recordings have become essential to the dissemination of contemporary concert music to potential audiences; it is through private, largely home-based settings that listeners become aware of the hundreds (and probably thousands) of symphonies composed since the early twentieth century. With the advent of music streaming services during the present century access to contemporary symphonies is ubiquitous for listeners with web access. However, given the huge choices available from subscription streaming services or YouTube, some reliable and informed guidance or curation may assist listeners to discover and cultivate an interest in particular works. This book seeks to fulfil this purpose, especially in relation to Australian symphonies.

The symphony against the backdrop of modernism and postmodernism

Modernism posed a major challenge to the ongoing viability of the symphony as traditionally defined. The relative absence of tonal centres in serial, totally chromatic music, the unfashionability of clearly defined, recurring themes and the post-1945 avant-garde developments negate several of Robert Simpson’s parameters of symphonism. As Charles Wilson notes,

To composers forging a brave new language in the aftermath of World War II the traditional preoccupations of symphonic writing – thematic development, tonal focus and unified architecture – seemed obsolete and irrelevant. And, as a result, many significant composers of
Definitions and International Context

the later (as of the earlier) 20th century chose to neglect the medium altogether.30

Furthermore, the association of aspirational symphonism and community-building power with totalitarian and imperialist states did not sit comfortably with the post-1945 zeitgeist. Julian Horton adds,

…the international avant-garde’s forceful rejection of past modes of expression in the 1950s, which seemingly ruled out of court anything as bourgeois or traditional as the symphony, led in time to a new diversity of symphonic practice, which scrutinised the idealist lineage through a self-consciously deconstructive lens (Berio), or absorbed recognisably its formal preoccupations into a late modernist idiom (Lutosławski, Carter, Maxwell Davies, Henze).31

The relevance of the symphony has thus, at best, been ambiguous if not problematic to modernist composers, especially since 1945. In his article, ‘Modernism’ Leon Botstein lists five streams of modernism that had emerged in concert music by 1933 and which, he believed, could be traced throughout the remainder of the twentieth century:

(i) the Second Viennese School, made up of Schoenberg and his followers…; (ii) the French-Russian axis, dominated by Stravinsky; (iii) German Expressionism, which included Busoni and the young Paul Hindemith; (iv) indigenous Modernisms, characterized by Ives in America, Bartók in Hungary, Szymanowski in Poland, Janáček and Martinů in post-war Czechoslovakia and Carlos Chávez in Mexico; and (v) experimentalism, characteristic of Hába, Varèse and Cowell, that led to the exploration of microtonality, the embrace of ambient sound and the machine and a fascination with non-Western musics and technology.32

Botstein observed, ‘These strands often came together in the work of particular composers. Many early Modernists, including Stravinsky, Bartók and Szymanowski, asserted the radical and modernist possibilities inherent in rural folk and pre-modern traditions’.33

Of Botstein’s categories, during the 1930s and 1940s the symphony was connected to composers associated with strands ii and iv as well as with politically motivated movements that emerged in the Soviet Union (and later its satellites), Nazi Germany and ‘New Deal’ USA (although in the cases of Prokofiev Symphonies 5 and 6, Shostakovich Symphonies 5, 7, 8 and 10 and Copland Symphony No.3 these can also be considered neo-romantic outgrowths of neo-classicism). During that period the symphony regained its place as the premier genre of large-scale orchestral music. However, by the early 1950s modernist styles associated with neoclassicism and its attendant neo-romanticism were overshadowed by Botstein’s strands i and v
and undergirded by theorists like Adorno and René Leibowitz. These featured serial and post-serial techniques based on complex pre-compositional schema, and the experimental tradition’s adaptation of electro-acoustic music and indeterminacy as the dominant forms of modernism. Music in such styles formed the mainstream of contemporary concert music by 1960 and shaped the education of young composers in the universities and conservatoria.

Although symphonies using serial techniques and atonality appeared during the 1950s, for instance in works by Searle, Frankel and many other British composers, their focus on themes and their development, linear counterpoint, traditional orchestration and teleological structures seemed outmoded in the face of the new music. The new fashion was for shorter orchestral pieces that emphasised pointillist treatments of the orchestra, fragmentary melodic ideas, dissonant intervals and harmonies, irregular rhythms and metres, textures and new sounds (like woodwind and brass multiphonics) or instrumental combinations other than the traditional or neo-classical approaches to orchestration that might focus on principal themes and accompanying figures. Aided and abetted by the rise of structural analysis amongst musicologists and composers, the focus of the ‘new music’ was its intricate design and its sheer originality in sound and effect rather than audience accessibility and comprehension. Meanwhile, forward-thinking administrators like the BBC’s Sir William Glock ensured that concert and broadcasting programming include significant representation of contemporary modernist works. The Australian equivalent of the 1960s was the contribution of ABC musical director and conductor John Hopkins in ensuring the inclusion of contemporary Australian works in the programming of the six ABC state orchestras.

Although it appeared that modernism had become the mainstream of new concert music in the 1960s, by the mid-1970s widespread reactions were evident. Early signs had emerged in John Cage’s rejections of strict compositional control and increasing complexity during the 1950s, the early manifestations of minimalism during the early to mid-1960s (especially Terry Riley’s seminal work In C) and the highly provocative Sinfonia (1968) of Luciano Berio, particularly the third movement with its substantial quotation of the scherzo from Mahler’s Symphony No.2 and many other quotations from prominent concert works. Minimalism, in particular, challenged the fundamental taboos of modernist music: undisguised major and minor triads, tonal and modal centres and regular pulse. In its wake, by the mid-1970s significant numbers of European and American composers were reviving tonal and modal principles within the core of their compositional practice. Instead of diffuse and complex, changing rhythms, both regular and irregular driving pulses animated the music. Clear themes, thematic development and teleological development towards musical climax were projected through traditional treatments of instrumental sonority and orchestration.
A number of established composers expressed disillusionment at the apparent emotional sterility of their own modernist music and the pressures on them to conform to the modernist norms that dismissed tonal music as ‘useless’ or populist. They welcomed the opportunity to communicate emotions and to illicit emotional responses from audiences. Many other composers, of course, remained consistent with their modernist aesthetics – a thread in contemporary concert music that remains vibrant through to the present internationally and locally, in Australia. These new attitudes prompted heated and, at times, polarising debates about the efficacy of modernism and the new, apparently reactive, stylistic trends.

Alongside these stylistic developments, during the 1960s and 1970s there was a major revival of interest in the symphonies of Mahler, Sibelius, Nielsen, Elgar and Shostakovich in English-speaking countries, aided through the medium of the LP record, cassettes, stereo FM radio and, from the early 1980s onwards, compact disc. Although interest in Shostakovich remained strong, many of his symphonies entered ‘canonical’ status following the release of his alleged memoirs in 1979 and the gradual disintegration of the Soviet Union. The extensive quotations of the Mahler Second symphony scherzo in Berio’s Sinfonia occurred against the new familiarity accorded to Mahler’s scores. Finally by the 1980s and 1990s, there was a rediscovery and re-evaluation of mid-twentieth-century symphonists (including complete sets of symphonies) made possible by new recordings on the digital compact disc – music which had been largely neglected by modernist composers, critics and music educators and allocated ‘backwater status’ by the major music history textbooks of the period.

Some commentators and theorists have described these neo-tonal and neo-romantic trends as key manifestations of postmodernism, even though the major theorists of postmodernism seem to have had little obvious influence on the composers of the 1970s and 1980s or on their stylistic choices toward more accessible styles. Nonetheless, by the 1990s and early 2000s, many writers on music were using ‘postmodernism’ as a stylistic descriptor of what they heard. Significant polarisation was observed between those modernist composers and critics who perpetuated post-1945 avant-garde techniques, and those who composed with tonal centres, thematicism, linear counterpoint and regular pulse. Amongst the Australian symphonic composers interviewed or studied within this book, all make their stylistic choices to express themselves, not because they are being self-consciously ‘postmodern’. Indeed, David Bennett’s set of composer interviews that formed the second half of his book Sounding Postmodernism shows a wide range of comprehension concerning the term and ambivalence about its association with their own stylistic and organisational approach to composition. Nevertheless, the terminology ‘modernist’, ‘postmodernist’ frequently occurs in the musicological literature and is reflected in periodisation of the music of the past 60 or so years.
For emerging composers in each generation, there is a different stylistic context. Katy Abbott’s interview in Bennett’s book, for example, shows that her formation as a composer post-dated the contentious debates about style and the renewal of tonality of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Matthew Hindson writes music with inflections of rock styles or ambient ‘new age’ music because he wants to and because he is attracted to those styles, not to express irony, or to make commentary on such styles himself. British symphony composer Matthew Taylor commented:

I’m a bit wary of labels – we seem to have so many conflicting theories of post-modernism. For me, the symphony is so linked with the past and the symphonies I love – Haydn, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Bruckner, Sibelius, Mahler, Nielsen and my wish is to extend the principles in this music so close to my heart to give it life in modern consciousness. I don’t know what that makes me (and I don’t really care, that’s for others to wrestle with).

In the Australian context, there have been at least two major shifts in the musical environment that have reflected this modernist/postmodernist phenomenon. In the 1950s, there was little encouragement to write serial, post-tonal music in Australia and very limited capacity to study composition at all in the main tertiary music conservatoria. Such courses did not exist in the curriculum even though there were fine composers like Raymond Hanson and Dorian Le Gallienne on staff. To study composition formally, or to experience modernism directly, emerging Australian composers had to study in the UK or in Europe. Don Banks, Malcolm Williamson, David Lumsdaine and David Morgan learned serialism during the early to mid-1950s in the UK: Keith Humble studied with René Leibowitz in Paris. With the exception of Lumsdaine and Williamson, these composers returned to Australia. By the mid-1960s, modernism entered its heyday in Australia with such landmark works as Homage to García Lorca of Richard Meale and Sun Music 1 by Peter Sculthorpe.

From the mid-1970s as modernism became mainstream and the initial excitement had waned, a substantive change in the environment allowed a wide plurality of styles to emerge and remain by the mid-1980s: the imperative to write in modernist styles to be taken seriously as a composer was now a free choice. When the author was studying composition at the University of Melbourne between 1976 and 1978 one was encouraged to work within serialism and electro-acoustic music. By the late 1980s, this was no longer prevalent. There were stylistic pre-requisites ‘in the air’ at each of these epochs. For this reason, this book considers the composers in each generation as one of the guiding principles directing the narrative from the early 1960s to 2020.

Perhaps Eric Salzman’s four stages of revolution, synthesis, revolution part two and synthesis part two make better sense as a reading of the
twentieth century\textsuperscript{41} than the modernist/postmodernist dialectic. Salzman logically sees postmodernism as his second period of synthesis or consolidation. This makes good sense in the history of the symphony in that the first period of synthesis of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s takes in the neo-classical and neo-romantic revival of interest in the symphony that occurred during that period. Surely, too, the interest in classical textures and forms that marked Stravinsky’s neo-classical phase, including, at times quotation techniques, prefigures the collage, quotation and the restoration of traditional melodic, harmonic and scoring conventions that emerged widely during the last 25 years of the twentieth century.

However, Salzman and the other period historians including Richard Taruskin, Joseph Auner, Robert Morgan, Mark Radice, Alex Ross, J. Peter Burkholder or Arnold Whittall have not explored the connection between the revival of the symphony as a major form since 1975 to postmodernism or neo-romanticism (or any other movement). Beata Boleslawska, however, makes a direct connection between postmodernism and the resurgence of the symphony, noting a series of other terms that could be used to describe the trend: ‘Besides ‘New Romanticism’, there have appeared such labels as ‘new humanity’, ‘natural music’, new spirituality’, as well as ‘new tonality’, new modality’ and ‘new lyricism’. She prefers the broader category of the ‘post-avant-garde period’ to ‘postmodernism’.\textsuperscript{42}

It appears, too, that the revival of the symphony has been sustained throughout the first 20 years of the twenty-first century. Is the present interest in the symphony simply a cyclical fashion? Each revival of the genre during the periods 1870–1910, 1930–1950 and 1975–2020 followed periods in which writing symphonies was unfashionable or anachronistic. Will the symphony suffer neglect again with another wave of fashion, or with the (unhoped-for) collapse of large orchestra infrastructure in the wake of the devastating Covid 19 pandemic of 2020–2021?

These big concepts of revolution and consolidation (for which ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’ might be useful shorthand) form the backdrop for the apparently tenuous survival of the symphony during the 1960s and then its revival since the mid-1970s. It must be acknowledged that period labels and ‘isms’ are incapable of covering all of the major trends and styles that occur within any period. For example, Rachmaninoff, Medtner, Schmidt, Strauss and Korngold continued to write in post-romantic styles using functional chromatic tonal harmony through the 1930s and 1940s, at the same time as serialism, early experimentalism and neo-classicism. So-called ‘tonal’ composers (but not employing functional common-practice harmony) like Britten, Shostakovich and Holmboe remained active through to the mid-1970s through the height of modernism. These overlapping of styles are evident, too, in the much lesser-known Australian music environment. Conservative composers like William Lovelock, Robert Hughes, Dulcie Holland and Eric Gross continued extended tonal styles of the 1930s in their music of the 1960s.
Definitions and International Context

The symphony during the 1960s and 1970s

Against the backdrop of movements such as serialism and integral serialism, indeterminism, minimalism, sonorism and the various kinds of tape music, the notion of a big work for orchestra that develops organically and cogently, taking an audience on a journey with a beginning, middle and end seemed old-fashioned and irrelevant. The major composers of the period Stockhausen, Boulez, Babbitt, Cage and their acolytes did not compose symphonies. However, despite the apparent incongruity of the symphony in such an environment, new symphonies continued to be performed and broadcast into the 1950s, the 1960s and beyond.

In Britain, for instance, the so-called ‘Cheltenham’ symphony perpetuated the form into the 1970s and a significant body of composers produced major cycles of symphonies. Some of these works link back stylistically to the symphonies of Bax, Walton and Vaughan Williams while others like the symphonies of Benjamin Frankel and Humphrey Searle make use of 12-note serialism. The eight Frankel symphonies were composed between 1958 and 1971. Michael Tippett’s Symphonies 3 and 4 date from the 1970s. Britten’s Cello Symphony dates from 1963. In his 80s, Havergal Brian composed 19 symphonies between 1960 and 1968. Edmund Rubbra’s Symphony No.8 emerged in 1968 after 11 years of symphonic silence and three other symphonies appeared during the following decade. George Lloyd’s Symphonies 8–12 and Malcolm Arnold’s Symphonies 4–9 were composed between the 1960s and 1980s. Peter Racine Fricker composed his Symphonies 3–5 during the 1960s and 1970s and maintained his tonal style of previous decades spiced with polytonal harmony. The other composers tended to write in more dissonant idioms than before, sometimes with the guiding principles of serialism. William Schuman (1910–1992) composed his Symphonies 8–10 during the 1960s and 1970s. Their rhythms remain driving and relentless with more angular and
chromatic melodic materials and dissonant harmonies and counterpoint, with Symphony No.9 demonstrating his adoption of serial processes. Walter Piston (1894–1976) composed his last two symphonies in the 1960s using serialism to generate a more chromatic palette to the overall neo-classical foundations evident in his earlier symphonies. Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987) composed his Symphonies Nos. 8 and 9 during the 1960s and 1970s while David Diamond (1915–2005) wrote four symphonies between 1960 and 1993. Peter Mennin (1923–1983), the youngest in this group, composed three symphonies between 1963 and 1981, the style noted for much stronger harmonic astringency than his previous output and retaining the pugnacious energy of the fast movements and elegiac slow movements as before.

In Germany, Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012) was the major German symphonist after Hindemith and Hartmann, composing six symphonies (5–10) after 1960. His works show that the full-textured serial and atonal traditions of Schoenberg and Berg continued to be cultivated well into the second half of the twentieth century. Even though his music is imbued with serial elements from Symphony No. 2 onwards, Henze did not follow the ‘Darmstadt track’ of his contemporaries like Stockhausen but retained the notion of melody and continuity (and theatricality) and the influence of Stravinsky in his large-scale symphonies. Jungheinrich groups the first five symphonies as preliminary, neo-classical approaches to the problem of the modern symphony and sees Mahler’s influence on Henze after 1960 leading him to see the symphony as ‘expressing the world’ from Symphony No. 6 onwards.

Amongst established Scandinavian composers of symphonies, Vagn Holmboe (1909–1996) had already completed eight symphonies by 1951, but went on to write five more after a 16-year hiatus. In these works (9–13), Holmboe maintains his essential neo-classical musical language at a higher level of dissonance than his earlier works. Einar Englund (1916–1999) returned to the symphony in 1970 after a 23-year hiatus with his Symphonies Nos. 3–7. Allan Pettersson (1911–1980) composed 12 out of his 16 symphonies between 1960 and 1980. The Estonian composer Eduard Tubin (1905–1982) was already an established composer of symphonies before 1960 and composed Symphonies Nos. 7–11 during the 1960s and 1970s. Many other Scandinavian symphonies date after 1960 as we will see presently.

Beata Bolesławska specifically addresses the Polish symphony during the avant-garde period in Chapter 3.4 of her book after considering the various innovations of the post-1956 period of modernism best represented in Witold Lutosławski’s *Funeral Music* and *Venetian Games*, Krzysztof Penderecki’s startling sonorist works like *Threnody for the victims of Hiroshima* and the early serial works of Górecki. Nevertheless in this same period, there were a number of important symphonies: Lutosławski’s *Symphony No. 2* and *Livre for Orchestra* appeared during the late 1960s, Górecki’s first two symphonies appeared in 1959 and 1973, respectively and Penderecki’s Symphony No. 1 (1973) is regarded by Bolesławska as his final avant-garde work. Polish exiles Roman Palester (1907–1989 – five symphonies, two composed
in the late 1970s) and Andrzej Panufnik (ten symphonies, seven composed after 1960) also contributed significantly to the symphony, based in France and Britain, respectively.

In Belgium, Marcel Poot (1901–1988) completed four of his seven symphonies between 1970 and 1982, retaining his extended tonal, neoclassical idiom of the pre-World War Two period.

This surprisingly rich selection of symphonies from the 1960s and 1970s (and there are probably many more) belies the notion of the symphony being redundant.

The symphony after the high point of the avant-garde

The return of tonal centres, thematic presentation and development, large-scale structures, linear counterpoint, regular pulse and traditional approaches to orchestration provided a fertile environment for composers to cultivate the symphony once more. Even prominent modernist composers born in the 1930s began to compose symphonies. The output of symphonies from the late 1970s until the present is surprisingly prolific and this account of some of the composers and works cannot do justice to the enormous scope of this repertory.

In Britain, Peter Maxwell Davies produced his Symphony No.1 in 1978 – an apparent shift from his confronting, iconoclastic works written for his ensemble The Fires of London (but perhaps prefigured in his two Taverner Fantasias for orchestra of the 1960s). The symphony, in four movements, is a massive work lasting some 50 minutes. Davies claimed influences from Sibelius and Mahler, although obvious sonic reminiscences of these composers are hard to hear. His score represented exactly what is heard in its complex, multi-layered textures; there was no apparent aleatoric polyphony unlike the almost contemporary Lutosławski Symphony No.3. The Symphony prompted considerable debate about the nature of symphonic music, most notably by Hans Keller, noted earlier. Davies then embarked on a major series of large-scale symphonies that continued until No.11 in the second decade of the twenty-first century, many of which are on a similar scale to Symphony No.1. And yet, Davies’s idiom remained modernist and complex in its use of detailed pre-compositional schema adapted from fourteenth-century isorhythmic and isomelic principles, amongst others. Hugh Wood’s 40-minute Symphony Op.21 (1982) in four movements is serial but is marked by enormous energy and sustained speed – unusual in atonal, serially based works – in the first and third movements. The movements are interspersed with quotations from Wagner’s Die Walküre and Parsifal and Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte. Wood’s culminating gesture is an undisguised major chord.

However, for other composers in Britain, tonal centres, considered a hallmark of symphonic procedure by older composers like Robert Simpson, once again could help form large-scale musical processes. Robin Holloway’s Symphony (1998–1999) is a massive hour-long musical chronicle of the