

**Title:** Towards the Summers Night

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### **Abstract**

The Summers Night Project is a composers mentoring program established in 2018 by musicians Cat Hope and Gabriella Smart, with the support of new music organization Tura New Music. The project aims to support and mentor emerging Australian composers identifying as women to create new compositions for performance, with the aim of growing the gender diversity of composers in music programs Australia-wide. Three new works were workshopped, recorded then performed on a short tour of Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne, Australia in July 2018.

Three composers were chosen from a national call-out and the works were performed by an ensemble consisting of members from the Decibel and Soundstream new music ensembles. The project takes its name from Australian feminist Anne Summers, author of the ground-breaking examination of women in Australia's history 'Damned Whores and God's Police' (1975), and was inspired by her 2017 'Women's Manifesto'. The paper will examine the rationale for the need of a project of this kind, the processes and results of the project itself, and plans for its future.

### **Biographies**

Musician and composer Cat Hope is Professor and Head of Music at Monash University's Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music, and in 2009 founded the Decibel New Music ensemble, of which she is Artistic Director.

Pianist Gabriella Smart is a leading exponent of new music and has given award-winning premieres of many Australian compositions. She established the Adelaide based Soundstream New Music in 1993.

Nat Grant is a sound artist and researcher working across live performance, recording, digital and community arts. She holds a PhD in composition from the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne).

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The Summers Night Project is an ongoing composers mentoring program established in 2018 by musicians Cat Hope and Gabriella Smart, with the support of the organization Tura New Music, on the unceded lands of the Kuarna, Whadjuk Noongar, and Kulin Nations. The project aims to support and mentor emerging female and gender minority Australian composers to create new compositions for performance, with the aim of growing the gender diversity of composers in music programs Australia-wide. Three new pieces were workshopped, recorded, then performed on a short tour of Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne, Australia in July 2018.

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The project takes its name from Australian feminist Anne Summers, author of the ground-breaking examination of women in Australia's history 'Damned Whores and God's Police' (1975), and was inspired by her 2017 'Women's Manifesto'. This paper will examine the rationale and the need for a project of this kind, the processes and results of the project itself, and plans for its future.

It is important to note that the language used in the initial Summers Night call-out encouraged 'women' and 'female' composers to apply. The Summers Night project was always intended to be inclusive of and open to any composers who identify as women, as well non-binary and gender non-conforming artists, yet this was not clear enough in the language used. This point will be made clear in the next call for submissions.

The project was initiated from a conversation between Cat Hope and Gabriella Smart when they were working together on the 2016 Soundstream Emerging Composers Forum. Smart noted the difficulty in attracting women to the long running program, where Hope was a mentor that year. Both realised that just being women visible in the industry was not enough to attract others to it, and decided they would pool resources to create a new mentorship program. Hope took this idea to new music organisation Tura, who were looking for projects to encourage more gender diversity in their programs, and they offered to produce and host the project.

In addition to this help from Tura, Hope and Smart garnered financial backing from their respective institutions, and set about finding other supporters, including Monash University and Soundstream, APRA AMCOS, the Australian Music Centre and Decibel New Music Ensemble. The combined efforts of all these groups were essential to the success of the project. The Adelaide concert was further supported by the Helpmann Academy and the University of Adelaide, Elder Conservatorium of Music. ABC Classic FM and The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) at Edith Cowan University also made significant contributions by recording and hosting the project.

The unique mentor model adopted by the Summers Night project saw the composers mentored by both composers and instrumentalists. This model of mentorship is of particular significance given recent moves to acknowledge the importance of the performer in the

creation of new contemporary compositions, in addition to their contributions to the actual realisation of a new work.

The composer mentors were Professor Cat Hope from Melbourne, Rebecca Erin Smith from Perth and Becky Llewellyn who is based in South Australia. The performance mentors were Stuart James (electronics), Derek Pascoe (winds), Tristen Parr (cello), Gabriella Smart (piano), and Cat Hope (flute and electronics).

Hope is a composer and musician who is Head of Music at Monash University, Melbourne, and South Australian pianist Smart is a leading exponent of new music, having given award-winning premieres of many Australian compositions. They are both artistic directors of and performers in new music ensembles; Hope with Decibel, and Smart with Soundstream. These ensembles came together as the performers and performance mentors for the project.

The composer mentors worked with three mentees, selected via a call out sent to the states of Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria.. The call for submissions invited composers of any age, genre or background to apply, with the aim of growing the pool of gender diverse composers in music programs Australia-wide. The call opened in February and closed in March of 2018. The composers were announced mid March and the commissioned works were due at the beginning of June. Mentees could also propose to be part of the ensemble and involved in the performance of the works. The instrumentation for the compositions was to include any or all of the following instruments: percussion, cello, flute, saxophone, electronics, and piano. The participants were provided with a commission fee, travel, and accommodation in each city they visited.

The successful mentees were:

Rachel Bruerville from South Australia, who had recently graduated with Honours in Composition from the Elder Conservatorium.

Carmen Chan Schoenborn, a percussionist and composer from Melbourne.

And Olivia Davies from Perth who is currently completing Honours at the University of Western Australia.

After a series of three initial meetings, the composer mentors and mentees gathered in Perth, Western Australia, where they worked alongside the performance mentors to develop new works for performance. This workshop intensive enabled the composer mentees to continue to develop their compositions with the assistance of the performers' experience, and culminated in a premiere performance at the Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, that was recorded by ABC Classic FM. In addition to rehearsals and meetings, the workshops included tutorials on common issues for composers working in new music, opportunities for career development, and knowledge sharing between mentors and mentees. The composer (and performer) mentors were able to share technical skills with the mentees but also professional development opportunities: to demonstrate what it's like to be a working composer, how to communicate, how to best present scores and instructions clearly, and how best to manage rehearsal time.

This included a discussion of Summer's 2017 Manifesto, intended as a blueprint enabling equality for women in Australia, and articulating clear goals for change, one of which was the right to participate fully and equally in all areas of public life.

After the premiere performance, the tour progressed to Adelaide and Melbourne: the mentors travelling with the mentees, providing opportunities for adjustment and improvements across a total of three performances. The project came to a close with a final concert and panel discussion at Monash University as part of the Gender Diversity in Music Making Conference in July 2018.

At each performance opportunity, talks were presented: a pre-show event in Perth with project co-founder Cat Hope and Tura donors that had supported the project; a 45 minute lecture on Gender Equality in music as part of the Adelaide Festival of Ideas, and a panel discussion involving all participants at the Gender Diversity Conference in Melbourne, facilitated by Sydney based sound artist Gail Priest.

In addition to the anecdotal experience of Hope and Smart, the Summers Night initiative is built upon research undertaken around women in new music. This demonstrates programs such as this needed, as less than 20% of composition graduates in Australia who identify as women go on to have careers in music. Only 21% of APRA (the Australian Performing Rights Association) writer members identify as women, and for every dollar a male APRA member earned in 2017, a female APRA member earned, on average, only \$0.77.

The three works that were developed were:

Rachel Bruerville's composition, "Ruby, Shine Bright" for flute, tenor saxophone, cello, piano, percussion and electronics. This work paid homage to Australia's first female Doctor of music, Doctor Ruby Davy.

Carmen Chan Schoenborn's "Our Current State of Progress" for flute, tenor saxophone, cello, piano, percussion & electronics. Carmen's piece explores graphic notation and quotes from the Global Gender Gap Report 2017, highlighting the call to action to accelerate gender equality. Carmen also performed percussion in her piece.

Olivia Davies' "The Shape of Breath" for flute, bass flute, tenor saxophone, cello, piano & electronics explored connections and interactions between live electronics and performers.

The concerts featured works by mentors Cat Hope and Becky Llewellyn alongside the mentee's pieces. Hope's "Shadow of Mill" (2016-2018) for solo cello and subtone was featured alongside Llewellyn's "Karli's Laugh" (1993) arranged for the full ensemble. The pairing of the mentor and mentee compositions was intended to offer the opportunity for mentees to experience how the mentors oversaw the preparation of their own works for performance and tour.

The project received a substantial amount of media coverage in the callout stage and throughout the tour, including print media feature articles in the Australian newspaper and the Adelaide Advertiser, radio interviews on Perth's rtrfm, National ABC classic fm, radio adelaide, and 5mbs (Adelaide), and online via the Australian Music Centre, APRA Amcos,

and The Australian Arts Review. An online review of the concert series by Eduardo Cossio of 'Cool Perth Nights' describes the project as "fascinating for the diversity of compositional approaches,... (they said) there is no doubt of the timeliness of this initiative; *The Summers' Night Project* represents a step forward towards a more inclusive and diverse music community."

Since the 2018 project took place, two of the works have been performed again by the Decibel New Music ensemble: Oliva Davies' *The Shape of Breath* was performed at the Gender Diversity in Music and Art Conference at the University of Western Australia in July 2019, and Carmen Chan Shoenborn's *Our Current State of Progress* was performed in Melbourne as part of Decibels '10 at 10 Melbourne Edition' concert, resulting in another broadcast of this work on ABC Classic FM.

A survey of the mentors and mentees was undertaken at the end of the project. There was a consensus amongst all the mentees that having the opportunity to present their new works in three acoustically different venues was a great learning process, and the multiple performances allowed time to hone the works, which is rare as many commissioning processes involve only one initial performance of a work.

The mentees learnt about the nature of touring - the logistical and production issues that come with that, from finding instruments required to different sound checking processes and timeframes in the lead up to performances. They found it valuable to form relationships with their mentor composers, who will remain informal mentors and friends. They also agreed that being able to observe the mentors at work was incredibly useful: to see how the composer and performer mentors used rehearsal time efficiently and how clearly they interacted and communicated with one another.

The feedback from the mentors was that this project and others like it are vital to nurturing relationships and ensuring that there is a wider experience for composers outside of the study opportunities available in universities. In a panel discussion at Monash University in June 2018 Gabriella Smart commented that universities tend to be closeted and (she said) "I don't think that they deal with such issues of professional development as what it's like to be a composer in the real world." The Summers Night project offers a very tangible experience in communicating with performers in a workshop situation and allowed the composer mentors to demonstrate how to communicate clearly when fulfilling commissions as working professionals whose time to develop new works is limited.

For the performer mentors, the benefits of working in person with the mentees helped them to understand and realise the mentees' visions for their works. Particularly in regards to electronics, an element often left out in the early planning stages of musical compositions, and as all the mentees' practices in this area are still evolving: to consider electronics early and as very much part of the compositional process, not as an afterthought. Composer mentees were able to contact Stuart James, the electronics performer in Decibel, regarding any electronics they wished to use: ultimately all composers used electronics to some degree. The performer mentors agreed that having several concerts of the same program to refine and continue to develop the works was especially invaluable in this area.

At the conclusion of the project all the partners involved discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the first iteration of the Summers Night project. It was noted that performers required more rehearsal time in addition to the workshop time provided.

Also, the ABC recording of the premiere put considerable pressure on all involved, and it was decided that in future, a recording at the conclusion of the project tour would be more appropriate. It was also noted that being a composer and performer mentor, as Hope was, turned out to be too demanding on the individual - resulting in less time dedicated to each role for the mentee.

The next Summers Night project will be expanded to include composers from New South Wales and Queensland with 5 concerts in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, and new project partners Sydney Conservatorium and Clocked Out Duo, and presentation partner Griffith University. Five composer mentees will be selected (one from each state), and the project welcomes new composer mentors Erik Griswold and Damien Ricketson as well as new performer mentors Vanessa Tomlinson and Aaron Wyatt.

The call out will be mid - late October this year to start the first steps of mentoring in later November.

The call for application will be sent out in networks from Tura, Soundstream, Griffith, Sydney Conservatorium, Monash, on social media as well as from the mentors themselves.

<https://www.crisap.org/event/sgfa-tokyo/>

<https://www.tura.com.au/tura-program/the-summers-night-project/>

