

**FLOW IN COLLABORATIVE MUSIC
PERFORMANCE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF FLOW FOR A
PIANO ACCOMPANIST**

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE

AT

CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

FACULTY OF ARTS, BUSINESS, INFORMATICS AND EDUCATION

VOLUME 2

October 2011

DECLARATION

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at Central Queensland University or any other tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the material presented in this thesis is original except where due reference is made in the text.

Judith Elizabeth Brown

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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PREFACE TO VOLUME 2

The narrative that is presented in this volume represents the data that is central to this autoethnographic study. It uses devices of creative writing, including direct speech and scene setting, to allow the reader to understand my experiences of flow during collaborative music performance as a piano accompanist. This different writing style sets it apart from the rest of the thesis, and so it is presented as a separate volume of the thesis. Furthermore, it is presented in full because it is central to the analysis that follows.

The analysis discussed in chapters 4 to 7 in Volume 1 identifies the various themes and concepts that emerge from this narrative and were identified through the autoethnographic process of writing and then iteratively reading the data. Quotes from the data are used throughout chapters 4 to 7 to support the discussion of these themes and concepts that form the basis of the theory for understanding the research question.

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Part 1

Tiggy-tiggy Touch Wood.¹ The name still makes me shiver. A piano piece by Australian composer William James. I didn't care about its origins when I was a kid. It was my first really big hurdle playing the piano, and even now I have strong memories of the pain it caused me. I was only ten years old when I learnt this particular piece. I had been playing the piano since I was seven and had progressed beyond the absolute basics to something with a little more difficulty in rhythm and phrasing.

“Judith, you must get this rhythm right. Count!”

I played a few bars, faltering over the rhythm and the jumps in the melody. The piece really lived up to its name. It was full of staccato chords that leapt all over the keyboard far from the normal placing of my hands. Its rhythm was particularly elusive – dotted notes, syncopation – great for painting the sound picture, painful for the beginner pianist. My piano teacher, Mrs Greenway, taught over forty students in her home studio and was one of the most fastidious music teachers in our city, twenty-five kilometres north of Adelaide. Even though I had been with her for three years, I was still nervous before every weekly lesson and dreaded her reprimands – even if they were well deserved. Mrs Greenway was starting to lose patience.

“You really need to work much harder on this piece, Judith. I can't understand why you can't get it right. I expect it to be better next week.”

I tried not to cry, but this was not going well and every time I played, it got worse. I had been practicing this piece, but no matter what I did, I could not get the hang of its jerky tune. *Tiggy-tiggy Touch Wood* was turning into a nightmare. It was meant to be one of those fun pieces you play in between learning music for exams. So much for the fun – this one had me stumped and it was getting to me.

¹ *Tiggy-tiggy Touch Wood* is a piano piece by the Australian composer William Garnet James (1892–1977), composer and pianist, who was the Director of Music for the Australian Broadcasting Commission from 1931 to 1957. He has composed numerous works for the piano but is best known for his set of Australian Christmas Carols (Tunley, 2007).

I bit my lip and tried again, but to no avail. The end of the lesson could not come soon enough. I was out the door and on the way home, breathing a sigh of relief that this week's piano lesson had finished.

During the next week, I tried and tried to get *Tiggy-tiggy Touch Wood* just right. My parents thought it amusing that this piece was causing so much agony.

"Why don't you have another go at the *Tiggy* piece dear?" encouraged my Mum with a wry smile on her face. "It's really quite cute."

"I hate it! I can't get it right!" I retorted and left the room.

That was the end of practice for that day, but I came back to it day after day until the dreaded piano lesson arrived again. I was not looking forward to more reprimands. All I could hope for was a 'tick' that meant we had finished that piece and could move on.

My piano teacher was a short, stocky lady, and as a young piano student, she seemed to me to be very old indeed. In reality, she would have been in her 40s when I started piano lessons, but she was firm and demanding, and, looking back over the seven years I learnt from her, she demanded a high standard of practice and performance. She could be encouraging too. I never had to endure the old school routine of 'slapping over the fingers with a ruler' when mistakes were made, but I was expected to work hard and make improvements in between lessons.

"Come in dear," said Mrs Greenway, opening the door to her studio.

My hands were sweating, as they often were, and I settled at the upright piano in her small music room. We always started with a few scales and exercises, and that was fine by me. I had no problems with rote learning. I practiced these regularly and the muscle memory did not let me down.

"Let's hear *Tiggy-tiggy Touch Wood* now," said Mrs Greenway perching her glasses near the end of her nose and looking at me with a look that meant – 'I hope you can get this right today, Judith.'

I played, and faltered again – same place, same problems – or so I thought.

"That's a little better," she said and reluctantly put a tick near the end of the piece. "I think we'll move on to something else."

I was immensely relieved. Mrs Greenway was not one to totally crush my confidence but she didn't let me get away with slackness either. Her tick never came easily and was always hard won. Maybe she realised that any further battle over this piece was not worth it. I would have to master rhythm in another way, in another piece, on another day.

We spent the rest of the lesson discussing the new pieces I needed to learn for my exam the next year. Mrs Greenway would demonstrate these and I always enjoyed listening to her play. She was so confident in her performance and knew her repertoire well. I was always learning lots of pieces through the year, so that when it came to exam time, I not only had the four 'List'² pieces ready, but also could include up to six 'Extra List' pieces. This meant that practice at home needed to be a daily routine and I never recall my parents having to force me to practice. I did this of my own accord, and over the years, I began to select my own pieces for exams and for my leisure playing, and I was starting to think that the piano could be a career for me. Music was beginning to be a big part of my life.

Part 2

My sister is two years younger than me. She learnt the violin from Mr Greenway³. While Mrs Greenway restricted herself to teaching piano, Mr Greenway taught many instruments including violin, piano accordion, and guitar as well as music theory classes. My sister and I both sat in on his theory lessons, working through the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB)⁴ grades

² The Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) requires students to prepare three or four contrasting works from the syllabus for each music exam. These are called List Pieces and relate to particular styles of repertoire such as studies, eighteenth century works, nineteenth century works and modern works. These are given a high weighting in the examination. Students are also required to study other pieces for the examination at the same level of difficulty called Extra List pieces. These works are given less weighting in the examination.

³ Mr Greenway was an accomplished musician and music teacher in my hometown. He taught a wide range of instruments including violin, guitar and piano accordion. The piano accordion was a popular instrument when I was a child and Mr Greenway taught this instrument in groups of up to six people at the local church hall. He also taught music theory classes on Saturday afternoons in one of the rooms in their house that had been converted into a small classroom complete with desks and blackboard at the front.

⁴ The Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) conducts music exams in most instruments and music theory throughout Australia and New Zealand. The qualifications, from Preliminary,

year by year. Although he was not a specialist string teacher, my sister progressed well as a violinist under his tuition. He was a real ‘all-rounder’ and seemed to possess a great deal of patience as well as a great love for music and his teaching.

It was October and preparations were being made for the annual end-of-year studio concert. This was to be held in the Greenway’s home studio on a Saturday afternoon with afternoon tea following in the back garden.

“Wouldn’t it be lovely for you to accompany your sister in the concert?” announced Mrs Greenway in my piano lesson.

There was definitely a cuteness factor at work here. Two sisters performing together – what a delight for the audience of proud parents. Little did she know that we were, in fact, less interested in being cute and reacted as totally normal siblings. That is when we started to practice together – we fought. I can’t honestly recall what we fought over, but practicing at home was a nightmare for us both, as well as our parents who tried to moderate the proceedings. It was so fraught, indeed, that the tension threatened to derail the whole concert performance.

The day of the concert arrived. About twenty parents and young students filed into the Greenway’s small lounge room. It was adjacent to the music studio and had been set up with rows of chairs. The piano had been wheeled out to the centre front so that everyone could see the performers, and each of us were nervously sitting with our parents, waiting for our turn to perform our well rehearsed pieces.

“And now I’d like to introduce Judith and her sister to play together for the first time,” announced Mrs Greenway.

It was a very nerve-wracking moment as we both stood up from our seats and moved to the front. The hours of painful practice were all put behind us as we endured the two minutes of performance. It was one of my sister’s exam

through Grades 1 to 8 and then at the Diploma level (Associate, Licentiate and Fellowship) are recognised internationally and are similar to those provided by Trinity Guildhall Examinations Australia, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts (ANZCA).

pieces⁵, and although it was not really hard for me to play the accompaniment, I had to concentrate really hard to cancel out my nerves. Not only did I have to play my own part well but I also had to keep an eye and an ear out for what my sister was playing. This was way out of my comfort zone.

Enthusiastic applause greeted us as we finished. We both sat down and the rest of the musical performances went by in a blur.

“Thank you for coming everyone,” said Mr Greenway to bring the concert to a close. “Please join us for afternoon tea in the back garden.”

Out the door we flew and into the food. My sister and I joined all the other children tucking into the fairy bread and cup cakes. This was followed by a huge homemade trifle – Mrs Greenway’s specialty. Why not? Our ordeal over, we helped ourselves to an extra large serving.

My sister was violently sick all night. Maybe it was an after effect of the stress of performing? My sister didn’t think so – she blamed the trifle. We both laugh about this incident now but it was many years before she dared to indulge in this dessert again.

Part 3

I studied piano with Mrs Greenway for nearly seven years, completing all my AMEB grades from Preliminary through to Grade Five – one every year – with an A or A+ grading every time. Mrs Greenway was careful to ensure that my technical development was structured in such a way that all styles of music were covered and I had the skills to tackle each level of performance.

In the first year of learning the piano I had my initial encounter with the *Dozen a Day* (Burnam, 1964) series⁶ for technique development. These are a

⁵ Neither my sister nor I can actually remember the title of the piece we played together. It was not until later, when we were working together as a regular duo, that the pieces become more distinctive in the memory. However, the experience of the concert and the afternoon tea remain distinct memories for us both.

⁶ There are six books in the series, *Mini-Book* then five books up to Intermediate standard. The exercises are specifically designed to be done before practicing and cover all aspects of technical development for pianists including chords, finger stretches, dexterity, speed and coordination between the hands.

much-loved set of books by Edna-Mae Burnam for the development of skills for the pianist, and they are still in print today. Each new piano exercise is described in terms of a physical skill, such as “climbing the stairs,” and is accompanied by a drawing of a little stick figure man doing the exercise. Such was my delight in doing these exercises that I used to play the exercises on the piano at home to my sisters, and, pretending I was the school teacher, get them to do the actual physical exercise. We had lots of fun with “climbing the stairs,” “hopping on left foot,” “hopping on right foot,” “skipping,” “chin-ups” to name a few – that is until they got bored with me and went to play elsewhere.

After several years I had mastered *Dozen a Day* (the final book is at the Intermediate standard) and I moved onto Carl Czerny’s dreaded studies. Opus 299, *The Virtuoso Pianist*⁷ was particularly daunting and Mrs Greenway introduced this to me at the end of my Fifth Grade. When I opened the book, all I could see were hundreds of black-looking notes filling the page, all with tempo markings at nothing less than *allegro*⁸. They might be the standard fare for advanced pianists, but at that point in my learning, they were daunting. I did not get very far with this book of studies until many years later, when my technique had improved and the fear of so many forbidding notes all on one page subsided. Nevertheless, Mrs Greenway knew they would one day be within my reach and an important part of my technical development, so the book of studies was duly presented to me as a present for doing so well in my Fourth Grade piano exam.

Similarly, she was always demanding a musical performance of my pieces. It was not enough to just play the notes and follow the directions of phrasing and dynamics, but I was to find the character of the pieces and portray the intention of the composer through my performance. A special set of pieces we worked on were the *Scenes from an Imaginary Ballet* by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor⁹

⁷ Opus 299 is a set of 40 etudes for the piano written by Austrian composer Carl Czerny (1791–1857). Czerny was a pupil of Ludwig van Beethoven and a prolific composer as well as a pianist and teacher. Most of his works remain forgotten, but his piano etudes form the basis of the technical development for all classical pianists, even to this day. During his lifetime, he also published several theoretical treatises, which have provided modern scholars with valuable information about performance practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Burkholder, Grout, & Palisca, 2006).

⁸ *Allegro* is an Italian term that means to play at a lively and fast tempo (Turek, 1996).

⁹ Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) was an Afro-British composer and conductor whose compositions are written in the Romantic style of the nineteenth century. *Scenes From An*

(Coleridge-Taylor, 1911). The five pieces in the set gave me the opportunity to explore many expressive elements of music – dynamics, phrasing and especially *rubato*. The art of *rubato*¹⁰ was introduced to me in these pieces and their pictorial intentions made it easy to experiment with pulling about the tempo and the linkages between *crescendo*¹¹, *diminuendo*¹² and *rubato*. The pieces were never part of the exam repertoire *per se*, but were extra works to be studied. My piano playing began to be freed up as I explored ways of transforming a piece of music into a work of art.

Mrs Greenway was extremely thorough. This meant that no matter how well I performed in some parts of the curriculum, I could still not avoid the really difficult parts – like sight-reading. In every AMEB graded exam, candidates are required to complete a sight-reading test, and for me this was the biggest nightmare of all. I could not sight-read to save myself. There did not seem any way that I could practice this skill. Each year as I prepared for my upcoming practical piano exam, a few months before the exam, Mrs Greenway would bring out the dreaded book of sample sight-reading tests and I just had to muddle my way through each test piece after about one minute of reading time. It was always an absolute shambles – no sense of continuity, rhythm or musicality – just a stammering and stilted version of the music played without a shred of musicality.

Although I continued to struggle with my sight-reading in my piano exams while learning with Mrs Greenway, an early inspiration in the piano sight-reading stakes came in the form of Bernice Yates. Bernice played the piano and electronic organ, and could play anything at sight. I first heard her play at a

Imaginary Ballet, Opus 74 is from a larger work, *Incidental Music to the Forest of Wild Thyme*. The African, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean elements in his compositions in melody and in title acknowledge the African heritage of his father (Scholes, 1970) .

¹⁰ *Rubato* literally means ‘robbed time’ and refers to the pulling around of the tempo that musicians add to music to increase the expressiveness of the performance (Turek, 1996) .

¹¹ *Crescendo* is the Italian musical term meaning to steadily increase in volume (Turek, 1996).

¹² *Diminuendo* is the Italian musical term meaning to steadily decrease in volume (Turek, 1996).

church family concert night when I was about eleven years old. The piece was *A Whiter Shade of Pale* by the band Procol Harum¹³.

“This piece has a similar feel to Bach’s *Air on the G String*,”¹⁴ announced Bernice before she started to play.

I was enthralled hearing something so recent from the radio.

“Do you have the music for that piece?” I asked Bernice after the concert.

“No, actually I don’t. I just made it up. It’s pretty easy – just a descending bass-line and then you improvise the melody across the top.”

I was in awe. How could someone just make up a performance like that without the music in front of her? Dad told me later that Bernice even improvised on the hymns when she played for church services – she could literally play ‘anything she liked.’

I decided then and there that I wanted to be able to play like Bernice. I wanted to play ‘anything I liked’ – any music that was put in front of me, and even make things up on the spot. To me, this was the mark of a virtuoso pianist – or so I thought at eleven years old.

Part 4

I had my first taste of performing in an important public concert when I was twelve years old. I was chosen as one of the state’s outstanding candidates from my AMEB Fourth Grade exam the year before, and had been selected to perform in the imposing Elder Hall at the University of Adelaide, right in the heart of the city of Adelaide.

“I have some excellent news for you Judith,” said Mrs Greenway as I arrived for my weekly piano lesson. “You have been chosen to play at the

¹³ The progressive rock band Procol Harum had a debut hit with *A Whiter Shade of Pale* in 1967. Written by Gary Brooker, Keith Reid and Matthew Fisher, the music makes references to Bach’s *Air* from the Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, but is not a direct copy of it (Covach, 2006).

¹⁴ *Air on a G String* is the nickname for the second movement, *Air* from the Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major BWV 1068 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The German violinist August Wilhelmj (1845 – 1908) transposed the *Air* into the key of C major and transposed it down an octave so that he could then play the entire melody on the G string of the violin (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

AMEB showcase concert in the Elder Hall. You will be playing on a beautiful Steinway grand piano.”

I had never played a grand piano before, so I was quite apprehensive.

Sensing this, Mrs Greenway set the scene.

“Well, on that Saturday afternoon, you should arrive nice and early and sit in the auditorium with your parents and sisters, as well as Mr Greenway and I. When it is your turn to play, you will walk confidently up onto the stage, bow to the audience and then play your piece. When the audience clap you bow again and return to your seat.”

I wasn't totally convinced, but I tried not to show my fear.

“This is very exciting,” I replied with some pretence of confidence.

“Yes it is,” replied Mrs Greenway firmly. “Besides, there will be lots of other lovely young musicians playing on the program. I think you should play your *Sonatina in A minor* by Gurlitt¹⁵. You know that very well from your exam. Let's have a listen to it now.”

And so we began many lessons thoroughly practicing the *Sonatina in A minor*, going through every dynamic and every phrase until it was polished to Mrs Greenway's standard. But as far as the performance experience itself, Mrs Greenway never really addressed the issue of performance nerves. She just expected that I would work it out for myself. I worked on the piece every day right up to the concert, and even on the day of the concert, right up to the time we left in the car. My last rehearsal at home was a bit of a disaster and my stomach was really starting to churn by this stage.

The forty-minute car journey to the Elder Hall recital was one I would do many times in the future, travelling from my home to Adelaide to perform in a concert. Mum and Dad sensed I was in no mood for talk and left me alone. I didn't even talk to my three sisters who also came along for this special occasion. My final practice had not been very good, and the day was overcast and grey. My

¹⁵ Cornelius Gurlitt (1820 – 1901) was a composer, conductor and music teacher. He is well known for his graded pieces for the piano mainly in the classical style (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

nerves were at knife-edge and I found it difficult to calm the knot growing steadily in my stomach.

It was a cold winter afternoon when we arrived at the university for the concert. The Elder Hall is a very impressive building with a lovely wooden ceiling and carved façade giving it National Trust status. With seating for over five hundred people and a stage resplendent with the Steinway grand piano front and centre, its formality was in itself very daunting. My heart was beating almost uncontrollably as we entered as a family. Elder Hall was officially opened in 1900 and, in 1972, when I went to perform there for the first time, it did not feature the creature comforts that were added in the refurbishments of 1978 and 2006. The hall was draughty and extremely cold. The bare floorboards let through the chilly winds and my family and I shifted uncomfortably on the unpadded wooden seats while we waited for the start of the concert. I knew from my reading of history it looked a bit like a cathedral, but I had no experience of such spaces. Our local church was small and friendly. It was all very daunting.

I had wanted to wear a big woolly jumper and thick socks and boots, but this would not do for such an occasion. My mother had made me a new dress made of light blue wool fabric. It was intended to keep me warm, but nothing could keep out the chilly draughts, exacerbated by my nerves. I wore my gloves right up to the time I was to play, and kept rubbing my hands together to try to keep them warm.

The girl before me played a clarinet piece by Handel and then it was my turn to walk onto the stage. The stage was accessed by a set of about six stairs on the left, making the platform quite high above the audience. It was a long and lonely walk from the side of stage to the centre. As I sat at the piano, the audience seemed so distant. Playing the grand piano was very frightening – the sheet music sits so much higher than an upright. It all went by in a blur. As I played my piece, I noticed the tiniest of errors, but I got through to the end. I was sure that I had disgraced myself. After all, this concert was a really big deal. Only the state's best candidates were invited to perform, and I was totally aware that I had to live up to some high expectations.

I returned to my seat amid the encouraging applause, to very proud parents and teachers, but I was still shaking from the ordeal. It took me some time to settle down and I was in awe of the performers who followed me. There were violinists, a singer, a clarinet player and many pianists, and they played fantastic pieces with so much confidence. My mind was opened to much new repertoire and I mentally noted a few of the pieces that I wanted to play “when I grew up” – especially the Brahms *Rhapsody in G minor*¹⁶. This was right near the end of the program and its power and passion moved me very deeply. The work features soaring melodic lines and a wildly contrasting dynamic range, showing off the full power of the piano. It’s determined Romantic style embodies so much of what I came to love about nineteenth century music over my years of piano study.

To my delight, and also that of Mrs Greenway, the next year I was invited to play again in the AMEB outstanding candidates concert. This time I was further advanced, having completed Fifth Grade piano, and so I was placed later in the program – I had gone up in the world. There were many of the same performers from the previous year as well as a few new faces. I looked eagerly on the program to see what they would play and as they took their turn on the concert platform, I admired them for their fantastic skills and musical ability.

Despite this, the concert was still held in the middle of winter, in the unheated Elder Hall. The cold draughts were no less easy to deal with. You could tell who were the performers when we entered the hall – we all had gloves on and were trying desperately to keep our hands warm before we played. I performed a *Prelude* from *Partita No. 3* by Kühnau¹⁷ and *Sprites* Opus 109 by Burgmüller¹⁸. The performance experience was no less daunting. In fact, I felt

¹⁶ This is the *Rhapsody, Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro*, Opus 79 No. 2 in G minor written in 1879 by the German composer Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

¹⁷ Johann Christoph Kühnau (1735–1805) was a German composer, conductor and teacher. He wrote many keyboard works as well as a large number of sacred choral works (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

¹⁸ Johann August Franz Burgmüller (1766–1824) was a German musical director and composer known mostly for his descriptive piano pieces for young children (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

more nervous knowing the type of concert that this was going to be, and who would be on the program.

I would meet many of these people again in Adelaide the following year at an Australian Society for Keyboard Music concert at the beautifully restored Edmund Wright House on King William Street. This building was originally opened in 1878 and was used for much of this time as a bank. In 1971, the State government saved it from demolition and, after extensive restoration, opened it to the public in 1972. Its classic Victorian architecture and vaulted ceiling in the central chamber made it a favourite for concerts and social events in Adelaide. I was invited to perform in an advanced students recital, as a guest of the Australian Society for Keyboard Music. I played the Brahms *Rhapsody*, Opus 79 No. 2 in G minor that I had heard only two years before and had been so impressed by its passion and energy.

Two years later, after the end of high school, I entered the Elder Conservatorium at the University of Adelaide as a full-time Bachelor of Music student. These same performers became my student peers. We lived far from each other, spread across the suburbs of Adelaide, and had been to vastly different high schools, but we shared these common formative experiences, nurturing our love for music and performance. During my university years, I would join them in music camps, orchestras and many of the concerts that formed the core of my music performance studies. I eagerly watched the careers of those who were ahead of me in their studies, and saw quite a few fill permanent positions in professional orchestras around Australia.

Although I did not know it at the time, these AMEB concerts on those June Saturday afternoons at Elder Hall were formative in shaping my identity as a performer. The cold continued to be a problem for me whenever I performed in Adelaide, and my collection of gloves and mittens grew substantially. I continued in the struggle to control my nerves, and despite my pre-performance routine being built around totally irrational and superstitious concepts, with each performance I was learning to bring them under control. Over my teenage years, I developed my practice routine before concerts in a superstitious way. I would practice the piece at home and hope that it would go badly, and I would deliberately rehearse until I had made quite a hash of the piece. I nurtured this

growing superstition that to have a good performance I had to have a bad practice just before. This irrational belief was reinforced every time I played in public. If I felt I had played well, then my terrible practice had been a good thing. If the public performance fell apart, I felt it was all due to playing too well at home. I was even affected by the weather. Dull, overcast days did not augur well for a good performance, or so I thought. Adelaide winters are renowned for such days, and so winter performances made me particularly nervous.

However, as my confidence grew, so did my desire to keep playing the piano, driving me to look forward to each new exam level, ticking them off as goal posts on my musical journey.

Part 5

After my Grade Five piano exam when I was thirteen years old, Mrs Greenway decided to retire from piano teaching. This was a really difficult decision for her to make, but the arthritis in her hands had become unbearable for her. She sent all of her students to other teachers and even sold her beloved piano. But the piano did not go just anywhere. Her piano found its way into our home, with Mum and Dad upgrading our old upright piano to Mrs Greenway's newer model. Mr Greenway also retired from music teaching, and so my sister and I moved to the Elizabeth Technical College for lessons with the music staff there. At that time, the Elizabeth Technical College was not only a place for trade training, but was a place for further education in many fields, including music. Under the umbrella of the college, children and adults alike could take individual instrumental lessons and even study for Certificates in Music delivered through the further education system (Galbreath & Pearson, 1982).

Studying music there was a turning point in my development as a pianist and accompanist. A whole new set of experiences opened up for me as I was given the opportunity to work not only as a solo pianist but in a range of different ensembles that formed part of the music department. There was a real drive from

the department head, Ms North, who was also my piano teacher, to bring the community into the college and create a hub of music excellence in our city.

Ms North was a specialist harpsichordist. She was well known in Adelaide as a performer and during her time as head of the music at the Elizabeth Technical College, she performed a number of solo harpsichord recitals. She opened up a new world of Baroque music to me, and in particular, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Ms North was passionate about the music of Bach and often shared this with me in lessons. “If I had to choose one piece of music to take onto a desert island, it would have to be Bach’s *Well Tempered Clavier*. ”¹⁹

Another time, I remember her saying to me, “There is so much beauty in this music, and it takes a lifetime to absorb.”

I had been working systematically through the *Well Tempered Clavier*, one Prelude and Fugue every few weeks. This was a different approach to Mrs Greenway. Ms North was interested in broadening my understanding of music beyond the mere solo exam repertoire. Every few weeks I was encouraged to start yet another Prelude and Fugue.

“Let’s have a look at this B flat major Prelude from Book 1 of the *Well Tempered Clavier*.” Ms North was in her element. “Many people play this much too fast – it loses all its beauty and becomes just a show-off piece. Bach gives no such tempo indications. You need to listen to the music and explore all of its possibilities.”

Ms North demonstrated on the piano. She took the B flat major Prelude and pulled the music about, adding *rubato* and dynamics that were not written on the score, but which brought the music to life for me. It was certainly a different approach to playing Baroque music. The harmonic shape was emphasized in the

¹⁹ The first book of *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (*The Well Tempered Clavier*) written by the German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) in 1722 contains twenty-four preludes and fugues in all the major and minor keys. He completed a second volume, also containing twenty-four preludes and fugues in all the major and minor keys, in 1744. The two volumes, also known as the *Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues*, is an extremely significant work in the piano repertoire even to this day. Although originally written for harpsichord, the title of the work refers to a system of tuning for keyboards that had been devised during Bach’s lifetime, that is suitable for all twenty-four keys (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

performance and the dramatic characteristics were allowed to dominate. I was starting to understand why this complete work would be Ms North's 'desert island music'.

As I studied this piece, I was given the freedom to explore the music on its own terms. Bach does not provide strict guidelines for the performance of his music. His original scores, now published as *Urtext* editions²⁰, show no metronome markings, no dynamic markings and no phrasing indications – just the musical notes. As a student performer, it was up to me to listen to his ideas through the music, and not just be an interpreter of the mere notation.

The F minor Prelude in Book 2 of the *Well Tempered Clavier* was another of these landmark works for me. Ms North encouraged me to explore the expressiveness of the *appoggiaturas*²¹ that dominate this piece and I was soon hooked. Bach was no longer the mysterious, confusing composer. I was gaining confidence to explore his music on its own terms – making my own musical judgments as I learnt more and more about the Baroque style and its application from the harpsichord to the piano.

Part 6

I joined my first music ensemble when I entered high school, becoming the official accompanist for the children's choir who were known as the Koolingarra Songsters. The choir consisted of about twenty-five primary school children, and as a community choir, drew upon children from all around my hometown. It had been in existence for many years, and its original accompanist was retiring. I had been recommended to the conductor by my piano teacher, Ms North.

²⁰ *Urtext* editions attempt to faithfully reproduce the original score as written by the composer and do not contain editorial markings such as phrasing, dynamics or pedaling. It had become common practice in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century for editors to add their interpretive markings to Baroque and Classical scores in particular. With the appearance of later twentieth century research into performance practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a desire to create authentic performances of these early works, *urtext* editions became more readily available and were preferred over edited collections of the Baroque and Classical works (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

²¹ An *appoggiatura* is an accented non-harmonic melodic note that resolves downwards to a consonant chord of less dynamic stress. It is notated in a variety of ways and was a common ornament in the music of the Baroque and Classical periods (Turek, 1996).

“Thank you Judith for taking on this job. I hear you have done very well with your piano playing and we need someone young like to you help out with the choir,” said Mr Williams, the conductor of the Koolingarra Songsters who had come around to our home to meet me. Before he left he passed to me a large briefcase bulging with music books and sheet music.

“I’ll see you next Tuesday afternoon.”

He left our house and I opened the briefcase. It was full of songs that the choir had performed over the ten years since its inception. The repertoire consisted of songs from music theatre, popular songs by artists such as the Seekers, and Simon and Garfunkel, and folk songs from Australia, Scotland and Ireland. I didn’t know where to start. When I first began to play for the choir, I had passed my Fifth Grade piano exam but sight-reading was still my biggest problem. I had a terrible fear of sight-reading and had never been placed in a position where I just had to play something ‘off the cuff.’ The Koolingarra Songsters changed all that.

“Let’s begin with *I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing*,” said Mr Williams at my first rehearsal.

I had heard this song on the radio, but it was not one of the songs I had actually practiced at home. It was time to think ‘on the job’ (or ‘at the piano’ in my case). The song begins with a really bouncy introduction and so it was important to try to capture that feel right at the start. My first attempts at this were not very convincing, but Mr Williams was patient and kept encouraging me.

The end of the rehearsal came really quickly, and now I had some idea of what was expected of me. I did try to practice at home, but inevitably I was caught out – the conductor could just request anything and we were expected to be able to play it straight away. It was sink or swim – and fortunately I swam. I learnt to sight-read not by any special methods, but just by being ‘thrown in the deep end.’

Over the years, much of the repertoire became second nature and, I must admit, a little boring. I played for the choir for about five years and by that stage I knew the contents of that briefcase inside out. We rehearsed once a week for an

hour and a half and the choir was asked to sing at many charity events, providing entertainment at nursing homes and school concerts, so we were often singing the same repertoire over and over again. New songs were gradually added but the sight-reading challenges grew less and less.

We had a couple of changes in conductor during this time. One conductor was a professional singer himself and would often perform a solo from music theatre at our concerts. The parents loved to hear him sing and I really enjoyed the challenge of accompanying him. He really knew how to make a song come alive and I was challenged to not only play the notes on the page but also carry the style and the character of the song in my piano accompaniment. His favourite solo was *If I Ruled the World* from the 1963 musical *Pickwick*, composed by Leslie Bricusse and Doug Ornadel. It was played at a brisk tempo with a rhythmic accompaniment featuring many large chords, and this kept me ‘on my toes’ every time we performed it.

I left the Koolingarra Songsters in my last year at high school when I was seventeen years old. It had been a great period of growth for me as an accompanist, but was just one of many accompanying experiences I had that challenged me during my high school years.

Part 7

Three years earlier, another chain of events took my accompanying experience in a new direction.

The phone rang.

“It’s for you Judith,” said Mum as she handed me the receiver.

“This is Pat here,” said the female voice over the phone. “Judith, would you be interested in playing the piano for our Christmas pantomime at the Shedley Theatre²²?”

“That sounds great!” I replied enthusiastically.

²² The Shedley theatre was part of the Elizabeth Civic Theatre complex and opened in 1965. There are two theatres in the complex, the “Octagon which could seat 1422 for theatrical productions or meetings, and also provide as large clear floor for balls, cat shows and the like, and the Shedley, a charming intimate theatre seating 412” (Galbreath & Pearson, 1982, p. 53). The theatre was named after the South Australian Housing Trust architect Mr G. Shedley who designed the theatre.

I was never one to say no to opportunities to play the piano and I was excited at the prospect of being able to play the piano for live theatre.

“Rehearsals are at the Grove primary school starting this Monday night,” Pat continued.

She went on to explain that the Showtime amateur theatre group was planning to put on a Christmas performance of *Dick Whittington*. Pat would be playing the electronic organ and I would play the piano. Together we would form the band.

“You will get paid Judith, and I will bring the music around to your house tomorrow.”

I was ecstatic! I was only fourteen years old, and I had my first paying gig as a piano accompanist. There were to be two weekends of performances at the Shedley theatre – a place that was to become very familiar to me over the next few years.

The music arrived the next day. My excitement evaporated as I perused the ‘score’. Pantomimes such as *Dick Whittington* are frequently produced using a play script and a music score created from popular songs from various sources. These types of pieced together scores give great freedom to theatre groups to produce a show that contains local humour as well as taking a traditional tale and updating aspects of it for the modern audience. As a result, the ‘score’ for *Dick Whittington* was a collection of sheet music of pop songs as well as handwritten charts that consisted of just a melody line and a few chords. Some pieces looked like a guitar charts with the words arranged in verses and a few chords scrawled above them. I was used to playing sheet music with the whole score written out showing all the notes to be played by the left and right hand – that’s what classically trained pianists are used to working from. The *Dick Whittington* ‘score’ had no such consistency. I was just provided with the bare bones of the music. I had to do the rest. It was up to me to improvise a piano accompaniment and fill in the gaps.

Pat was an old-school dance band musician and playing from these types of scores was normal practice²³ for her. All she needed was an outline of the melody and a few chords and she could create just the right style for each song in the show. She was a wonderful mentor to me and over the weeks of the rehearsal period I gradually acquired this skill. This was a big learning curve for me and I spent many hours at home over the next few weeks mastering the art of making something out of almost nothing.

But worse was to come.

I arrived at the first rehearsal and timidly entered the schoolroom where the cast had gathered. I knew a couple of people from Koolingarra Songster performances, and they welcomed me in. During the break, Pat told me they were hoping to use *Crunchy Granola* by Neil Diamond as the opening number.

“That’s fine,” I replied.

I knew the song well as it was the opening track of one of my favourite albums by Neil Diamond: *Hot August Night*²⁴.

“Trouble is we don’t have the sheet music,” continued Pat. “Do you think you could work it out from the recording?”

Not being one to say ‘no’ to any request put to me nicely, I took it upon myself to transcribe the music from the recording. It took many hours over many days, made all the more difficult by the fact that it is not even a piano piece, but is scored for guitar and rock band. I was beginning to regret being such a pushover.

²³ Scores of popular music songs are often written in an abbreviated fashion providing just the melody line and the harmonic structure for the musicians. The rhythm of the melody line provides some indication of the overall rhythmic intentions of the piece, but it is often only implied by the melody itself. The musician needs to use their own understanding of the musical style to play the music correctly – at the right tempo and with the right sense of phrasing and attack for the style. Thus musicians who play popular music need to gain experience often by being immersed in the style and applying their musical skills gained through an acute aural awareness of the idiom. Classical composers have developed a highly sophisticated system of notation that enables them to convey to performers their exact intentions with regard to style, tempo, rhythm, phrasing, dynamics and attack. Classical musicians therefore become highly trained in the interpretation and reproduction of a fully notated musical score and sometimes find it difficult to work from a score with significantly less musical information on it.

²⁴ *Hot August Night* is a double album of a live concert performed by Neil Diamond on 24 August 1972 at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles. During 1973 and 1974 it spent 29 weeks as number 1 on the Australian album charts (Jackson, 2005).

At the next rehearsal I was asked to play my version of *Crunchy Granola* so that the choreographer could set moves for the dancers. I felt very vulnerable. I was being judged in a totally new way. My performance had to sound like the Neil Diamond version, and yet I was playing an instrument that could never do it justice – a piano playing a guitar line.

“Great work,” said Pat after I had finished.

She was obviously pleased with my attempt.

“We’re going to use this music as the lights come up to have a dramatic opening number.”

Fortunately, I had many more rehearsals to go before opening night, and many more times playing it through to get it right. Most of the rehearsals were held in December, and school and music exam commitments had reduced to almost nothing. Every weekend was taken up with the rehearsals for the show and many weeknights also. By this stage my concerns about playing such an ad hoc score had evaporated, and I was enjoying the role of accompanist in the theatre. The role was described to me as a *répétiteur*²⁵. Although this was a foreign term to me, I soon realised that my role did in fact involve a lot of repetition. But the repetition was useful to me at this stage. It gave me plenty of time to find my feet in a new environment, and more time to develop the style of the songs to enhance the enjoyment of the show.

When we finally bumped into the theatre, I was able to set myself up in the orchestra pit in such a way that I could see Pat on the organ as well as the action on the stage. It was a fantastic vantage point. I really felt part of the show and an essential part of the production. I was hooked from this experience. I became well entrenched in the lively amateur music theatre scene in my city, honing my skills as a *répétiteur*, an accompanist and, eventually, a musical director.

²⁵ *Répétiteur* is a French term that appeared in the nineteenth century to refer to the pianist employed by an opera house to rehearse with the singers and guide them in the learning and interpretation of their roles. It also refers to the pianist for ballet company rehearsals (Scholes, 1970).

Part 8

I had practiced the score well ... or so I thought. *Annie get Your Gun*²⁶ has some memorable and catchy show tunes in it and I had a lot of fun playing through the vocal score before I got to the first rehearsal. I knew lots of these melodies already from playing the piano selections in the quiet and privacy of my lounge room, but this was the first time that I was going to be a rehearsal pianist, on my own, from the beginning of a show. And it was a proper, full-scored show too. No extras pieces of music thrown in, no transcribing the latest pop song to open the show – just playing the music in the vocal score.

My hometown had three amateur music theatre companies that were filled with lots of enthusiastic performers, dancers and theatre ‘junkies’. Each company did one or two shows a year, so it was exciting to be asked, as a fifteen year old with seventh grade piano under her belt, to take such an important role from the start. I wasn’t the musical director, but until the orchestra arrived in the final week or two before the opening night, I was the source of all musical accompaniments.

The double classroom at my local primary school room was filling with people when I arrived. It looked and felt so different at night – not like a schoolroom at all. I suppose it was having all these adults there – all ages from teens to the more ‘mature types’. I didn’t know anyone that well – just a few from the pantomime group, so I just sat at the upright piano and nervously followed the instructions from the musical director.

They began by singing through of a couple of the chorus numbers and then it was time for a dance number. Opening to the page for the first dance number, I was ready to go.

“Five, six, seven, eight” called the choreographer, and I began to play at the nice steady tempo I had practiced.

“Stop, stop,” she said after only a couple of bars. “That’s not the right tempo. It goes like this...”

²⁶ *Annie Get Your Gun* was written in 1946 by Irving Berlin (music and lyrics) and Herbert and Dorothy Fields (book). The stage production was followed by an MGM film version in 1950 starring Betty Hutton and Howard Keel (Larkin, 1999).

She clapped her hands at about two or three times the tempo I had rehearsed. My mind whirled. This was so much faster than I had anticipated. My heart raced.

“Let’s start again... Five, six, seven, eight.”

I had no time to catch my breath or even look at the music again. I just threw myself into playing again. My fingers flew and I have no idea if I got to the end with a great deal of accuracy, but I got there with mostly the right number of beats and pretty much the right number of bars.

It was a terrifying experience. I was embarrassed to not be able to play the music exactly as it was required. There was definitely a greater expectation on me than the pantomime performance of *Dick Whittington*, and this added to the pressure of the rehearsals.

During the next week I took that vocal score of *Annie Get Your Gun* and rehearsed every dance sequence as fast as possible. No matter that the tempo was marked *allegretto*, or *andante – presto*²⁷ was the name of the game – *presto* was what I needed to survive the next rehearsal.

And survive I did.

The orchestra joined the rehearsals in the last couple of weeks before opening night and this took the pressure off. I really enjoyed playing with the larger group, contributing to the overall musical experience of the show.

There were three weeks of performances – Thursday to Saturday – a total of nine shows. It became my social life as well as my musical life. I had to juggle schoolwork, piano practice for my exams as well as rehearsals and the show, but I made so many new friends all with a common interest in the theatre.

At first I was really sad when each show finished. It had become so much a part of my life that I could not imagine having a weekend without a rehearsal or performance. As the last chorus was sung, I often had a tear in my eye – as did a few of the cast members. We had become a real community and the conclusion

²⁷ *Allegretto* is an Italian musical term that means to play moderately fast. *Andante* is an Italian music term that means to play at a moderate walking pace. *Presto* is an Italian musical term that means to play at a very fast speed (Turek, 1996).

of the season signalled an end to that intensity of working together to bring a polished product to a public performance.

This bond of community was the strength of the amateur musical societies in Elizabeth during the mid 1970s. No sooner had one show finished, than another one had started up. In any one year, there could be up to six musicals performed at the Shedley theatre. There were not many touring professional productions coming to this theatre, except for a few companies providing school performances or school holiday shows for children, so it was the amateur theatre groups who provided the cultural backdrop for Elizabeth. The shows were well supported by the large immigrant community. Elizabeth had many families who had migrated from the United Kingdom during the 1950s and 1960s. Mostly working class, they looked for entertainment in their own town rather than going into the city centre for the big shows. In the 1970s, the Shedley theatre was a lively centre for the performing arts, with musicals being the favourite fare of the local audiences (Galbreath & Pearson, 1982).

There was quite a rivalry between the three amateur societies and there was keen competition to attract the best performers and musicians to work on a show. It was not long before I was sought after by all three groups to be the accompanist for their shows. I had started to demonstrate that I had the ‘chops’²⁸, to play these musicals, but also some of the other important traits of an accompanist – an ability to work with a large number of people with different temperaments; an ability to be patient and willing to repeat music as often as required; and to play with vigour and passion – contributing to the musical performance not just as a background performer, but as part of the overall musical fabric.

Adding to my increasing enjoyment in playing for these musicals was the fact that I was being paid for what I was doing. I was paid a total of one hundred dollars to play for the three months of rehearsals and the three-week performance season. I thought this was a huge amount of money, but I found out later this was below the average weekly wage for a male in South Australia between 1972 and

²⁸ ‘Chops’ is a colloquial term meaning I had a high enough level of technique to play the music as presented to me.

1973 of \$93.00²⁹. Considering that the average ticket price for these shows was only two dollars for adults, my one hundred dollar honorarium was a large amount of money for a teenager. Also it meant that I did not need to get a part-time job working in a fast-food outlet or a supermarket through high school. My piano playing was enabling me to earn money of my own and I felt most grown up.

Part 9

The Northern Light Operatic Society (Galbreath & Pearson, 1982) had been in existence for many years before I began to play for shows, and they had a couple of very experienced pianists who regularly played for their musicals.

Carol was one of these pianists. She had played for many shows and was an excellent sight-reader. But more than that, she was an excellent ensemble player. She was totally reliable in that she always played the right rhythms and notes, and provided a solid basis for the singers on the stage. She had been a dance band pianist for many years and her musical companion was Doug who played the drum kit. Together they were the rhythm section in many shows and ensembles around Elizabeth.

Carol was an excellent role model for me in terms of her dependability. Many of the local singers would get Carol to accompany them if they were asked to sing a solo in a concert, and she had knowledge of a great deal of repertoire from music theatre to the popular songs of the dance band era. Carol was, however, quite a mature woman at this time, and getting close to retirement. It was not long before she pulled out of a lot of répétiteur work for the shows. Through watching and listening to accompanists like Carol, I was beginning to realise that accompanying was much more than merely staying in the background and forming a solid basis for the performer. As an accompanist, I could add a lot to the performance from my own playing. What I did mattered, because how I played could change the performance.

²⁹ This amount is according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Miller, 1975).

Robert was another accompanist at the Northern Light Operatic Society. Robert was younger than Carol but also had considerable experience in playing piano in other music ensembles. But unlike Carol, Robert came from a strong jazz background. He could improvise with ease, yet he could also read the vocal scores for the musicals with great accuracy. His technique was also well up to the mark. His playing added a lot of sparkle to the performances and, no matter what was asked of him; he could come up with the ‘musical goods’.

Robert needed an assistant accompanist. His day job precluded him from playing at every rehearsal, and especially at the long rehearsals that started to take up a great deal of time on the weekends. My work on *Dick Whittington* and *Annie Get Your Gun* had not gone unnoticed in the community and so I was approached to be part of this new production. This was a good opportunity for me to learn from someone on the job, so to speak.

“How about you play for the Act One run through,” said Robert one night when I arrived for the rehearsal.

I had ridden my bike to the primary school music room where the practice was taking place, and I was still a bit out of breath.

I agreed with some degree of hesitancy. I did not know this group of people really well, and I was nervous having to step up to this task so early in the rehearsal period.

The show was *Oklahoma!* by Rodgers and Hammerstein.³⁰ I found the fast tempo of many of the songs and the complexity of the key changes a challenge. I was not really well prepared and it showed. I felt quite embarrassed to be playing this badly while Robert was in the room. It became quite obvious that I was not as good as I thought I was. Robert had to give me lots of entrance cues and guide me on tempos as I was playing.

The act ended. Everyone took a break.

³⁰ *Oklahoma!* Was written in 1943 by Richard Rogers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyrics and libretto). It was their first collaboration and became a landmark musical in the history of music theatre. The show broke new ground with all aspects of the music and dance being fully integrated into the plot. The show also included a strong dramatic element that was realised in the ‘dream ballet’ famously choreographed in the original stage production by Agnes de Mille. The stage production was followed by a film version in 1955 starring Shirley Jones and Gordon MacRae (McLamore, 2004).

“You went okay Judith,” counselled Robert, “but you have to remember that it is the singers who are ‘treading the boards’. They are the ones putting themselves out on a limb on the stage. You’ve really got to support them in their task. They’ve such a lot to think about and the last thing they need is the accompaniment to be out of kilter.”

It was a good point. A lot of my playing had been inaccurate and lacking in confidence. This seemed to transfer to the singers who felt my lack of confidence. None of them, however, said anything to me, and I was grateful that I had an honest mentor in Robert.

Robert took over after the break, and I could sense his confidence in his work as the singers’ accompanist. It wasn’t about him – it was about the singers. He had a knack of giving them the right amount of support at the right time. It was a skill that would take me a few more years to master, but at least my awareness of this key element of the relationship between the performer and the accompanist had been awakened.

Part 10

“How was your concert on the weekend?” asked Alex when we started the first maths class one Monday morning.

I was in the maths-science stream in senior high school. There were only six girls among my year twelve class of twenty-three boys. I sat next to Alex for two years in all the classes except music. His only interest in music was the latest heavy metal rock release. He definitely had no interest in musicals or classical piano, and we maintained a friendly banter on the merits or otherwise of various styles of music during our senior high school years.

“How did you know I had a concert this weekend?” I asked with curiosity.

I hadn’t remembered telling him of my plans last week.

“You always have a concert on every weekend don’t you?” he replied. “I just assumed you would.”

We laughed. It was true. While my friends played sport or hung out at their friends' places over the weekend, I was getting more and more immersed in the music scene around Elizabeth and Adelaide. Even at school, my favourite haunt was the school music room, where I could be found most lunch times.

The school encouraged participation in music as an extra-curricular activity, and one of the most successful activities was the annual school musical. I joined my first school musical in year ten. A new enthusiastic music teacher, Miss Edwards, had managed to mobilise a few other staff to join her in staging Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*³¹. Reflecting on this many years later, I realise it was an ambitious undertaking. Gilbert and Sullivan operettas feature many complex ensemble numbers that require a lot of musical training. Furthermore, the solos, duets and trios can be very musically challenging. Taking on such a show for the very first musical at the school was quite ambitious, but at the same time, these shows do provide lots of opportunities for chorus participation and are full of great comic moments. As a student, I had no idea of these complexities. I was ready to jump into the experience boots and all.

"I'd like to audition for a part in the show."

I was responding to the school notices that morning and had arrived at the door of the music room promptly at 12.30 pm, just as lunchtime had started. I was eager to participate on stage this time.

"Wouldn't you rather play the piano in the pit Judith?" asked Mr Roberts who was directing the show.

But Miss Edwards read my facial expression.

"I think Judith wants to have a go at being on the stage this time," and she beckoned me in the door.

And so began my experience as a stage performer in a musical. This time I was not relegated to the orchestra pit. This time I could dress up and have a lot of fun without all the stress of being the rehearsal pianist.

³¹ Gilbert and Sullivan premiered *The Pirates of Penzance* in London in 1879 and in New York that same year (Kobbe, 1989).

Rehearsals were held for the cast during lunchtime as well as after school and on the weekends. It was a full-on commitment being on the stage. Many hours were required and there was no sharing of the duties. If you were cast in a role, you had to be there at every rehearsal. I was cast as Edith, a minor principal role. There were a few lines to sing and a few lines of dialogue. For the rest of the time, I was a member of the chorus of the Major General's daughters.

Despite the fun of being one of the cast members on stage, I found the transition to the stage gave me a new understanding of the relationship between performer and accompanist. This was my first experience as a solo singer, and although I had been a pianist and accompanist for some years, being on the other end of the accompaniment duo was a new and challenging role for me. This time it was I treading the boards and relying on the accompanist to provide the backing I needed. At times this left me feeling quite vulnerable. It was hard to manage all parts of the performance because so much of it was beyond my control. Someone else was setting the tempo and the best balance between singer and accompanist was not always achieved.

My many years of musical training definitely helped in the learning of the music and I had no trouble in memorising the score. I also gained a new appreciation for the difficulties faced by solo singers. When your instrument is within your body, its ability to operate in a consistent and reliable way can be heavily affected by circumstances that are difficult to control, such as the emotions and your physical health. Suddenly, I had to become more aware of looking after my voice and my mental wellbeing so that I could deliver a consistent and high quality vocal performance.

During one after school rehearsal we were working on the finale to Act One. These Gilbert and Sullivan finales are always big ensemble numbers that bring together all the actors and chorus members, and are often sung at a lively pace. Miss Edwards was conducting the chorus but our rehearsal pianist could not keep up. I found it frustrating that the teacher assigned to the piano accompanist role was struggling to play the score. She reverted to playing just the right hand in an effort to maintain the pace required. I was amazed that this was tolerated but I had no choice but to keep my feelings to myself, as I was

aware it would have been the height of arrogance to show any sense of frustration.

It did give me cause to think how the singers on stage would have viewed some of my early accompaniment attempts. Was I just as frustrating for them? Did my hesitant playing cause them discomfort or disrupt their performance?

My thoughts were interrupted by the necessity of learning the staging for this number. We were on our feet, somehow trying to move into the formations required by the director. All thoughts of the accompanist disappeared as I fumbled with unfamiliar stage moves while maintaining my singing.

From our point of view (that is, the school students and their supportive families) the show was a great success. The euphoria of performing on stage was quite intoxicating. The three performances slipped by so quickly. As soon as we entered the theatre for the final dress rehearsals and performances, the clock seemed to speed up relentlessly. Before we knew it, we were taking our final bows, hugging each other and packing up the dressing rooms. It was very exciting to be a cast member on stage, but looking back, the performance experience was so fleeting, and we were all filled with regret when the show was over. These feelings were quite intense at the time, even more so than when I was just a pianist in a musical production. As a singer on the stage, I had invested a great deal of emotional energy in the production. The whole experience of not only singing, but of getting dressed up and being part of the larger theatrical experience had been very challenging and extremely rewarding on a personal level. The end of the show left me feeling quite low.

“What are you doing at lunchtime today,” asked Alex during our maths lesson the following week.

He sensed that my mood was a little subdued in the aftermath of the school musical.

“Not much,” I replied, knowing that the lunch hour would lack the excitement of past weeks. “But that’s okay, I’ll find something else to do.”

Alex grimaced.

“You always do.”

Part 11

One of my most constant accompaniment partners was my sister. She was two years younger than me and played the violin. Although we initially used to fight and disagree over the most trivial things, such as who should give the lead when starting a particular piece, we soon settled into a partnership that was both musically satisfying and personally enjoyable. We were in demand to perform as guest artists in concerts put on by the local concert band and youth orchestra. Whenever there was a charity concert or Christmas gala, we were inevitably on the program.

The change from a duelling duo to a coherent performance partnership happened reasonably early in our playing together. My sister was selected to play in the AMEB concert for outstanding candidates at Elder Hall, just as I had been the past two years. This time I performed as an accompanist, not as the soloist. The performance setting was just as uncomfortable as it had been previously. Scheduled for a cold winter afternoon, the Elder Hall was still without heating. We entered the hall that afternoon with all the other performers and their families – gloves and mittens keeping the fingers just off freezing point, and doing little to mitigate the nerves that were ever-present at these prestigious public events.

Our item was close to the beginning of the program. We were performing a piece that we had performed many times together in public – Vaughan-Williams' *Fantasia on Greensleeves*³² arranged for violin and piano. The free tempo and evocative harmony in the opening bars establishes the mood of the work, capturing the idea of fantasy and medieval England. The sense of stillness that the composer creates in the first bars of the piece gave us both a chance to be expressive and musical right from the start. After that, the work establishes a regular tempo with the theme of the English folk tune *Greensleeves*, allowing us to settle in to the performance. Our favourite section came in the middle, where the composer creates a polyphonic section, combining two English folk songs.

³² Ralph Vaughan-Williams (1872–1958) was an English composer who took a great interest in using English folk-tunes in his compositions as a way of preserving the English musical heritage for future generations. The *Fantasia on Greensleeves* is part of his 1929 opera *Sir John in Love* (based on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and blends the traditional folk song *Greensleeves* with an East Anglian folk song *Lovely Joan* (Scholes, 1970).

The music is strident here and allowed me to contribute to the drama of the work, in a collaborative way, with my sister on the violin.

I learned much from playing this piece with my sister as the piece called for the pianist to do more than merely provide a harmonic background for the soloist. As it was a piano reduction of an orchestral score, I was in fact performing the work of the entire orchestra. Sometimes, my parts were more important than the solo parts, sometimes they were equivalent, and sometimes I was vital in creating the atmosphere and mood of the work through swirling arpeggio passages or strong, dramatic bass-lines. But it did have its scary moments too. It was quite tempting, for instance, in the staccato passages in the middle section to let the tempo just run away. If this happened – as it did many times in rehearsal – we quickly ended up losing control of the tempo, getting faster and faster and finding it difficult to reclaim our original steady pace. Intense concentration was always needed in performance – listening to each other carefully, listening to our own part carefully – balancing the excitement of playing this dramatic music with the calmness required to keep every part of the performance under control.

My sister and I had another favourite work that we frequently performed together – the famous tango *Jealousy* by Jacob Gade³³. Again, this piece allowed us both to revel in the drama and passion of the tango. There was great scope for the violin player to bring out the gypsy passion, and the piano introduction commanded the attention of the audience from the very beginning. *Jealousy* was easier to pull off in public than *Fantasia on Greensleeves*. There were fewer changes in tempo and it was written in a style where the piano part mostly provided the rhythmic and harmonic basis for the music. By the time we had played this piece together a few times, we both instinctively knew the tempo and dynamics.

My work with my sister created many opportunities in piano accompaniment while I was a student at both high school and university. These

³³ Jacob Gade (1869–1963) was a Danish composer of popular orchestral music. His famous tango *Jealousy* was first heard in 1925 at the premiere of the American movie *Don Q. Son of Zorro*, starring Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Astor. It then gained further popularity during the 1950s with a 1952 instrumental recording with Arthur Fielder and the Boston Pops Orchestra (Groppa, 2004).

early accompaniment experiences also brought me into contact with a range of music teachers who were particularly helpful in providing feedback regarding my accompaniment skills. One such vocal teacher was very forthcoming with advice when I was accompanying his singing student in preparation for a singing exam. The piece in rehearsal was *Caro Mio Ben*, a well-known Baroque aria by Giuseppe Giordano³⁴. It requires the pianist to provide a strong chordal accompaniment, yet its lyrics are gentle and loving.

“Make sure you play those notes in the left hand quite strongly,” he pointed out after I began the introduction timidly. “The singer needs to hear those bass notes. They are the notes that provide the foundation for everything. And as the singer goes higher, bring out your bass notes even more.”

Finding the balance between providing enough support to the singer without overwhelming them in volume was a lesson well learnt through my interaction with this teacher. I was glad of his honest approach not only to his singing student, but also to me as the accompanist. Without such clear and precise feedback, there was no way I could improve. I have used his ideas for many years working with singers and learning how to provide adequate support so that they feel comfortable and can then give a performance that is true both to the musical style and their best abilities.

Another music teacher, this time of a clarinet player, was keen to work not only with the clarinet player as a soloist, but the two of us together as we prepared for the clarinet exam. We spent many lessons working on the nuances of the second movement of the Mozart clarinet concerto³⁵, an exquisite piece of lyrical writing that requires a high degree of control in the shaping of the phrases and melodic line. My role, as accompanist, was to emulate the smooth *legato*³⁶

³⁴ Giuseppe Giordano (1751–1798) was an Italian opera composer. He is commonly acknowledged as the composer of *Caro mio ben* (*My dear beloved*) but this authorship is disputed. Both Tommaso Giordani (1730–1806) and his father Giuseppe, both unrelated to Giuseppe Giordano have been identified as possible authors (Kobbe, 1989).

³⁵ Mozart wrote one clarinet concerto in 1791 in the key of A major, K. 622. It was written for his friend Anton Stadler and was completed only months before Mozart’s death in December 1791. The second movement features a profoundly beautiful melodic line and is one of the composer’s most loved works (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

³⁶ *Legato* is an Italian musical term that means to play the phrase smoothly and well connected (Turek, 1996).

lines of the orchestral strings and this took many hours of patient feedback from the clarinet teacher. He was not content with just getting his clarinet student to play correctly. He wanted the whole performance to be as true to the classical style of Mozart that the clarinettist and I could achieve.

These experiences were invaluable in my development as an accompanist. I gained so much knowledge by working with many different teachers who were not necessarily my main piano teacher, but could offer perspectives on music that enriched my performance as an accompanist. Moreover, through these experiences I began to understand that my work was more than just accompaniment. It was, instead a key part of a series of collaborations, with the resulting performances true partnerships (Katz, 2009).

Part 12

“The phone’s for you Judith,” said Mum as she handed me the receiver.

This situation was increasingly common as, at a time before mobile phones, all the piano accompaniment requests came through our home phone.

“We’re looking for a pianist to accompany all our brass players in the Northern suburbs brass competition,” stated the strong male voice over the phone.

“Our committee was hoping you were available, and Julia Black has highly recommended you.”

I had then known Julia for several years. She was an excellent accompanist and played for concerts and musicals as well as holding down a job as studio music teacher and music lecturer at the Salisbury Teacher’s College. The brass competition was to be held at the College, but Julia was keen to get ‘new blood’ involved, and I was to be it.

I had learnt from hard experience that it paid to be a bit evasive when accepting these jobs. Over the years I had found myself overcommitted leaving me little time for my personal studies, let alone a social life.

“I’ll have to check my diary,” I replied. “Can I ring you back tomorrow?”

As usual, however, I found it hard to resist the opportunity to take on these requests, and the next day I rang back and accepted the task. It helped that I was being paid, but that strong recommendation stroked my ego. I liked being sought after. Who wouldn't feel flattered? Besides, each new musical group that I interacted with extended my networks. This meant more chance to build a solid reputation as an accompanist, and command a better fee each time. Mercenary? Not especially, but I must admit that getting paid did help at times.

This job turned out to be one of those times.

My transport was limited at this time as I was just eighteen and had no ready access to a car. After some discussion with the brass players, my parents agreed to let them come to my home for rehearsals. It had worked for my sister and the violin accompaniment, why not for euphoniums, French horns, trumpets and trombones as well?

Our usually placid dog who was quite used to sleeping through any type of musical event to grace our lounge room, howled throughout the rehearsals. My younger sisters tried to escape by heading outside to ride their bikes. Mum retreated to the far corner of the house to do her sewing and Dad avoided the lot as he was often working long hours in his job and the many community activities that he was involved in.

One by one the band members came in to practice their pieces. Not only were the instruments loud, they were also messy. The condensation formed mini rivers of water that flowed out of the instrument's bell, keeping me busy with sheets of newspaper to avoid drenching the carpet. At every break in the music, they would open up the valves and out came the water. This was a new experience for me!

The music itself was also a new experience. The most frequent form of competition piece for these brass band players was the air and variations³⁷ form. It would start with a rendition of the air – the *Carnival of Venice*, the *Holy City* –

³⁷ Air and variations (or theme and variations) form is a musical structure built on the principle of repetition. The piece begins with the statement of the air or theme. After this, the composer takes the air and slightly modifies it by changing aspects of the rhythmic or melodic structure, or tonality, thus altering the mood of the air or theme while still maintaining a musical connection to the original air or theme. This form has been popular since the 16th century (Turek, 1996).

popular choices for brass band competition pieces. This sweet little ditty would be accompanied by a very straightforward ‘oompah-pah’ accompaniment.

So far, so good.

Now it was my turn to play a few bars so that the brass player could rest their lips. My version of the ‘air’ suddenly escalated to many more levels of difficulty than the original tune. Double octaves, stride bass patterns, flourishes up and down the keyboard – it was all there. I couldn’t believe the difference in difficulty level. And we were still on variation one.

At least four different variations on the air followed. Admittedly it did get harder and harder for the soloist, and I continued with a predictable ‘oompah-pah’ accompaniment for each variation, but each interlude also became harder for me as the accompanist, almost to the point of impossibility. And with at least a dozen of these competitors to play for, each with the same type of competition piece to play, I could see my work would be cut out for me – no wonder Julia was keen to see someone new take on this work.

The other interesting characteristic of this accompaniment that stays as a strong memory, is the amount of following I was required to do to make these performances work. Some of the performers had no idea about how to keep a steady tempo. Whenever they were faced with lots of notes to play, they would slow down the tempo to accommodate them. Crotchets became minims, then became semibreves, and then went back to crotchets³⁸ again. My job was to follow – follow their erratic tempo fluctuations and follow their breathing. At least the breathing seemed to come in places that made sense musically – most of time the breathing coincided with the phrasing. It was a new experience to become so aware of this for an instrumental player, but one that would stand me in good stead in my development as an accompanist.

³⁸ Crotchets, minims and semibreves are names given to particular note values to indicate the duration of the sound. A semibreve is held for the duration of four crotchets and a minim is held for the duration of two crotchets. A crotchet is commonly used to indicate one beat, depending on the meter of the music being played (Turek, 1996).

Part 13

During my years at high school and university I was keen to learn about many styles of music and participate in ensembles of all genres. Although not part of my formal training as a pianist, jazz was a style that I became increasingly interested in during my final year at high school and through my university years. In the 1970s jazz was not a part of any tertiary music curriculum and was considered an addendum to formal classical training – something you might have a go at during your spare time, but not something to be studied on an equal footing with classical music.

I was introduced to jazz piano and improvisation while I was at high school. In year twelve I took music as a subject and spent many of my lunch hours hanging around the music block. One of the instrumental music teachers, Mr Goodson, was a jazz percussionist. Listening to him improvising on the vibraphone was inspirational. He could take the simplest melodic and choral progressions and make them groove. Several of my classmates were also captured by his love of jazz and soon we were using our lunch hours in a small ensemble, exploring the music of the jazz greats – me on piano, Dave on bass, Andy on drums, Frank on flute and Jim on clarinet.

The first tune we tackled was Herbie Hancock's *Watermelon Man*³⁹. The song has a gentle Latin groove and only a small number of chord changes, so it was a good song to find our feet with the jazz style. I was given a basic chord chart to work with and since I had some experience of chord charts from my répétiteur days in the Christmas pantomimes, I joined the ensemble with confidence.

I learned early on that I was part of the rhythm section⁴⁰. The rhythm section forms a solid harmonic and rhythmic foundation upon which melodic

³⁹ Herbie Hancock (b. 1940) is an American jazz musician who wrote *Watermelon Man* in 1962 for his debut album *Takin' Off*. The song was reworked for his 1973 album *Head Hunters* (Covach, 2006).

⁴⁰ The rhythm section consists of various rhythmic and chord instruments in a jazz ensemble or rock band. These instruments can include the drums, bass guitar, double bass, piano and guitar. The types of instruments used in a rhythm section may vary depending on the type of ensemble.

instrumentalists or singers can improvise on the melody. Mr Goodson had plenty of experience as a rhythm section member. As a percussionist, he not only played the vibraphone, he also played the drums. He further impressed us by describing the professional gigs he played at each weekend. Here was a musician who not only taught about music, but also could actually do it. He worked hard to keep his playing at a professional standard, and was also keen to pass this work ethic onto our ensemble.

“The thing with the jazz style is that you need to emphasize the off-beats,” reminded Mr Goodson at one of our lunchtime practice sessions.

Mr Goodson remained patient as he worked with me on getting the right groove for *Watermelon Man*. He knew I had many years of classical training behind me, and he was not going to let me off lightly. I had the ability to play the chords at the right speed, but my lack of understanding of the subtleties of the rhythmic groove of this Latin beat betrayed my classical roots.

“Is this better?” I enquired hopefully.

I gave the off beats an extra nudge and pulled back on the emphasis of the first beat of each bar.

“It’s getting closer,” he replied with a wry smile.

His good humour shone through even as he was giving me the correction.

The rest of the ensemble continued on as I adjusted my rhythmic groove and learnt to listen to the other players. Andy the drummer was particularly good at playing the Latin beat, and Dave on the bass seemed very confident and, to my ears, never faltered in his choice of bass notes.

It was an ideal training ground for me. We practiced as an ensemble often – everyday if we could. We kept our sense of humour and there was always a lot of laughter as we experimented with new songs, new sounds and new styles of improvisation. Our mentor Mr Goodson often gave up his lunch hour to listen to us and critique our playing. It was extremely helpful to have an extra set of ears especially in the early months of playing together.

The rhythm section provides rhythmic and harmonic backing for melodic instruments and/or singers (Porter, Ullman, & Hazell, 1993).

Mr Goodson soon introduced us to other jazz styles and jazz performers. One particular day he arrived at school with a book of jazz transcriptions by the jazz pianist Dave Brubeck. We began with *Take Five*⁴¹. Jim was in his element as he could take the famous saxophone solo originally performed by Paul Desmond in the Dave Brubeck Quartet. Andy had no trouble adjusting to the irregular five-beat rhythm and the piano and bass parts maintained an easy groove throughout.

Our next challenge was Dave Brubeck's iconic *Unsquare Dance*⁴². This is actually a blues tune, but its unusual time signature of seven-four provides a real cognitive and physical challenge to the players. It is scored for piano, bass, drums and finger clicks. Jim was our 'finger clicker', and together with Dave on bass they maintained the 12-bar blues harmonic progression and rhythmic *ostinato*⁴³ that runs through the whole piece. This is established without melody at first, and then the right hand of the piano takes up the simple melodic line. The real challenge is getting it to fit across the irregular rhythm. I had to learn to count like mad and avoid the constant temptation to even up the rhythm by adding an extra beat and make it four beats to the bar. It was as if I was fighting against myself and my natural musical instincts.

The drummer then has an extended solo using the rim of the snare drum. Andy seemed to take it in his stride managing the seven-four time signature as easy as any duple or triple time pattern. The final chorus of the blues pattern brings the piano back in with a full two-handed solo. The left-hand takes a stride bass pattern, jumping across two octaves in the bass while the right hand reiterates the original melody. It is the last four bars that provide the greatest challenge. The melody is truncated and while the left hand is keeping the seven-four time pattern, the right hand finishes in a triple time. It is only with the utmost accuracy that you all end together. If you stop to think as you play, it

⁴¹ *Take Five* is one of the most famous tracks on the *Time Out* album recorded by the Dave Brubeck quartet in 1959. The quartet consisted of Dave Brubeck on piano, Gene Wright on double bass, Joe Morello on drums and Paul Desmond on alto saxophone. The album features a number of pieces where Brubeck experiments with unusual meters. *Take Five* is an example of a piece in 5/4 time (Porter, et al., 1993)

⁴² *Unsquare Dance* is a track on the Dave Brubeck Quartet album *Time Further Out*, which was released in 1961 (Porter, et al., 1993).

⁴³ An *ostinato* is a repeated musical pattern (Turek, 1996).

cannot work. You have to almost go into automatic, allowing the left-hand to keep playing its time pattern, and ignore this as the right hand brings in the new time pattern. All the while the bass player and finger-clicker just keep going as before. It requires a real feat of concentration to play this piece and we rarely made it to the end together. Even the Dave Brubeck Quartet, the composers of this piece found this a hard piece to pull off. On their recording, which is perfectly executed, they laugh as they reach the conclusion, giving away their own level of concentration. This laugh was never removed from the recording and it remains as a sign of the human touch in the creative process.

Our jazz ensemble stayed together for the next four years. Four out of the five members went on to do the Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Adelaide. We learnt to play many jazz standards and this ensemble served to provide us with a break from the more formal classical studies that were required in our degree. One of the important lessons I learned from this ensemble playing was the ability to really listen to other musicians. Ensemble playing requires each member to listen carefully to others. Pianists, in particular, spend much of their rehearsal and performance time working as a soloist. Working in an ensemble is an invaluable part of learning to be a good musician. Furthermore, working with a drummer also helped me immensely with my sense of rhythm. I came to understand the sense of rhythm that underpins all genres of music, not only jazz and popular music, by working with a drummer who had an excellent sense of time and style. This stood me in good stead during all my studies as well as in my future musical career after graduation.

Part 14

Teresa was one of my 'regulars'. She was often asked to sing at charity concerts around our district, and I became her regular accompanist. She was nearly twenty years older than me and was keen to help me advance my career as a pianist and accompanist. Teresa worked as a dresser for the State Opera of South Australia and every now and then she was hired to be part of the chorus in one of their operas. Her strong alto voice was in demand for these productions.

This also gave her a good network of contacts for professional theatre in Adelaide during the 1970s.

I was now a full-time student at the Elder Conservatorium of Music at the University of Adelaide. Personal practice and my other academic studies occupied most of my time but one particular project stands out in the memory and it also involved me as a piano accompanist. This project was with the South Australian Film Corporation and involved the filming of *Breaker Morant* (Denton, 1973). Set during the Boer War, this film told the true story of Harry Morant, an Australian light horseman who led a group of soldiers, the Bushveldt Carbineers, during this bloody guerrilla war. He was accused of killing innocent civilians and sentenced to court martial along with Robert Handcock and George Witton. His defence was that he was merely following Lord Kitchener's order – take no prisoners. This was thrown out as evidence by the court martial that was held hurriedly and in secret. In the end both he and Handcock were shot by the British army as criminals, and Witton was sentenced to life imprisonment. Harry Morant was a South Australian, and it was only after the release of this film, based on the biography by Kit Denton (1973), that Morant's name finally appeared on the Boer War Memorial on North Terrace in Adelaide.

The contact came again by phone.

“My name's Julie and I am the production assistant for the South Australian Film Corporation.”

The call came at home during an afternoon early in my third year of study at the Conservatorium. By this stage in my study, my university contact hours were quite short, but the work had certainly increased in intensity. I was practicing between four to six hours a day, and much of this was done at home.

I answered hesitantly.

“How did you get my number?”

It seemed a fair question to ask, but I was far from upset. This sounded exciting.

“You might know Teresa Gillman? She recommended you as a pianist who would be a good accompanist. Teresa has been doing some work for us in the filming of *Breaker Morant*.”

My mind was racing. There had been plenty in the news about this new film project from the South Australian Film Corporation (Hardy, Stevens, & Beresford, 1980) and in particular about the events surrounding the court martial, sentencing and execution of Harry Morant – the Breaker – on 27 February 1902.

Julie continued.

“Teresa is involved in a scene where a Boer prisoner is brought in to perform a traditional song for some of the British soldiers. Teresa is playing the piano in that scene and we have just completed the shooting of that part. The English actor Edward Woodward⁴⁴ plays the main role in the film, Harry Morant, and our director, Bruce Beresford, only realised a few weeks ago that Mr Woodward is also a singer. He has released quite a few albums, and our director wants him to sing in the film.”

This was intriguing, but how would it involve me?

“It turns out that Harry Morant was also a poet, as well as a soldier,” explained Julie. “One of his poems was also set to music and the song is called *At Last* (Cutlack, 1962). The director thought it would be nice to get Mr Woodward to sing this in the film, so he asked Teresa if she would do this piano accompaniment. She told me yesterday that there was no way she was good enough for this work, but that she knew someone who was. And that is why I am ringing you now. Would you be available to accompany Mr Woodward in the film?”

This was definitely an offer that I could not refuse. It didn’t matter what was in my diary for the next few weeks. This opportunity would come first.

“Yes, I’m free,” I replied in my best calm professional voice, trying not to sound breathless.

⁴⁴ Edward Woodward (1930–2009) was an English stage and screen actor as well as a singer. He had great success appearing in the American television series *The Equalizer*, earning five Emmy Award nominations for his role as an ex-British spy. His recordings included the albums *It had to be you* in 1971, and *The Edward Woodward Album* in 1972 (Bernstein, 2009).

Julie arranged then and there for me to attend the recording session at a Norwood recording studio the following week.

“I’ll send the music in the post to you now, so you should get it tomorrow. Thanks for helping out.”

At the end of the conversation I took a few moments to digest the last few minutes of conversation.

“Mum! Guess what?”

I ran into the kitchen and relayed the conversation to my mother – the first of many retellings. This was an accompanying job that was right out of the box and I was determined to remember every detail.

The music soon arrived in the post. It was a photocopy of a very old song and parts of it were almost illegible. I got to work straight away practicing the piece until I was note perfect. It was written in the style of a late nineteenth century parlour song – the piano part was very grand and the accompaniment did not provide the melody for the singer, unlike most songs written in the last few decades. I suppose the writers assumed that most singers had some musical knowledge and could follow a score.

A few days later, Julie was on the phone again.

“Would you be able to record this song for Mr Woodward to practice with?” she asked after an initial exchange of pleasantries.

I thought this request a little odd. I had assumed that Edward Woodward, as a singer with a number of albums under his belt, would be able to work out the music for himself without the aid of a practice tape.

“Sure,” I replied. “Will he just need the accompaniment to the song?”

“Well apparently, he doesn’t read music, so he will need to hear the notes so that he can learn the song.”

“When do you need this by?”

The time frame was looking quite short, as the recording session was booked for the following week.

Julie replied a little apologetically.

“As soon as possible if you can. If you put it onto a cassette tape, I’ll come and pick it up from you and give it to Mr Woodward.”

Sounds like Julie had the run-around job. We didn’t live close to the city so this was going to be quite out of her way.

“I’ll have it done by tomorrow and you can pick up the tape in the afternoon. Say 2 o’clock?”

It gave me some time, but not much.

Julie rang off and I was left with the dilemma. I didn’t have much to record with – just an old portable cassette player with an in-built microphone. Over the next few hours I experimented with placing the cassette player at various distances from the piano, eventually settling on a spot that gave a reasonable recording of the song.

It took me many hours to complete. Each time I began the recording I would start to think about who it was for and I would get nervous and make too many mistakes. In order to make a tape with the melody for the singer, I had to do a re-arrangement of the song so that the melody was played with part of the accompaniment underneath. This was a new technique for me and I struggled to get the accuracy that I was demanding of myself.

By the time Julie was knocking on my door the next day, I had completed a cassette recording of *At Last*. There was a version of the song with the notes clearly played against an arrangement of the accompaniment and then a version with just the accompaniment alone. It was a scratchy recording and I was a little embarrassed to hand it over with such a poor quality.

Julie reassured me.

“It’s fine Judith. Mr Woodward just needs something to learn the song from. We’ll see you at the Norwood studio next Tuesday at 9 o’clock?”

“For sure.”

Part 15

The day of the recording session arrived. I did not have access to a car, so I had to take a train to the city and then rode by bicycle out to the Norwood studio. This didn't take too long, but I allowed myself plenty of time, arriving with some fifteen minutes to spare.

When I arrived I met Julie and she introduced me to the director Bruce Beresford and also to Edward Woodward. I was very nervous and felt overwhelmed by the company present. This was my first really professional gig and the adrenalin that was running through my body made me super-aware of all my surroundings and time seemed to go into slow motion. My senses were primed to receive every nuance from the performers and the production team, so that when we went into the recording studio I was at the peak of my concentration.

The recording was completed as a duo, rather than each of us playing our parts separately, and I was amazed at the musicality and sensitivity of Edward Woodward's singing. He could not read music, and had only learnt the song from my scratchy cassette recording, yet he performed immediately with a degree of musicality that I had rarely experienced with amateur performers. I felt my own performance matching his. It was as if he was driving this work of art and I was just one part of the process.

The recording was completed in two takes.

"Are you happy with that?" asked the producer of Mr Woodward.

We all crowded into the production booth and listened to the second take. Edward Woodward's voice was in fine form even at this early time of 9 o'clock in the morning and our performance had blended well together. All the discussion took place between the recording engineer, the director and Edward Woodward. No one consulted me. I was given no particular feedback on the performance yet they seemed to be happy with what I had done.

But I was not. In the rarefied atmosphere of this recording experience, I could hear every little mistake, every little hesitation. Right at the end of this second take, I had fluffed one chord. I was sure that it was obvious to everyone, but I was much too scared to even own up to it, or request another take. The

second take was accepted as the master recording, and my ‘blunder’ remained for all to hear.

I worried about this mistake for the rest of the day, and indeed it haunted me right up to the point of the release of the movie. Many months later, sitting in the audience waiting for this part of the movie to play, I was terrified that it would stick out for all to hear. I was ready to sink into my seat and die a painful death of embarrassment. The song started, it came and it went. My ‘fluffed’ chord was in the instrumental postlude and the recording engineers had allowed this to fade into the following scene. I was probably the only person to be aware of the problem, and, on viewing the film many years later I could not even detect the slightest error. My agony was all for naught.

The sound recording of the song *At Last* with Edward Woodward was not the end of my film experience with *Breaker Morant*. It seemed the director had been expecting a much older accompanist to appear for the recording.

“Would you like to appear on the set for the film *Judith*?” asked the director.

“We were originally thinking of just having an audio track, but now that we have met you, we might add another scene and actually show the song being performed by Harry Morant for his fiancée.”

“Yes, I would *love* to do this.”

It was very hard to contain my excitement at the prospect of being in a film. I tried to sound cool, calm and professional. My heart was racing.

“When would you like me to do the filming?”

“We are filming on location at Burra in a fortnight's time, so we would need you there,” answered the director.

“Julie will give you all the details and organise you to get fitted for a costume.”

The recording session was over within the hour and we were all on our way. Julie lined me up for a costume fitting at the South Australian Film Corporation Studios and I was set. Film ‘stardom’ here I come!

Part 16

I arrived at the South Australian Film Corporation studios with plenty of time to spare. The costume department had already received my measurements care of Julie, and my beautiful Edwardian costume was ready for a fitting. The black satin evening dress was pinched in at the waist and featured a full skirt falling to the ground. The bodice was sleeveless and demurely rounded so as not to reveal too much neckline and it was decorated with a cream lace collar. It all fitted perfectly.

“We will also need to look at your hair,” announced the costume department head ominously.

At the time, my naturally straight hair was permed into curls as was the fashion in 1979, but this was not going to work with an Edwardian up-swept hairstyle.

“We should be able to do something with this on the day,” remarked the hair stylist, lifting my curls with a hint of disdain. “We can use big curlers to try to straighten the curls and then we can tease it into the up-swept style.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. But it was short-lived.

“I want you to stop plucking your eyebrows now,” remarked the stylist as we both stared into the mirror. “Back in 1902 women did not pluck their eyebrows thin and we need this to look authentic in every way.”

“Okay, no worries.” I wasn’t about to let something as simple as thin eyebrows get in the way of performing on a film set, although I really didn’t like this authentic look. What was authentic for 1902 was definitely not fashionable for 1979.

“See you on location next week.” The stylist had finished with me and needed to move on to the next job.

I was dismissed and left in a state of euphoria. I floated out of the door and made my way home. This was all happening in the middle of my university term, but I was keen to prioritise the film experience. Uni studies could wait!

Part 17

The trip to Burra took about two hours by car. Situated about 150 kilometres north of Adelaide, this now ghost town used to be a thriving copper mining town in the late nineteenth century. It was used as a location for the filming of *Breaker Morant* as the countryside and old buildings in the township bore a striking resemblance to the South African landscape that witnessed the horrors of the Boer War from 1899 to 1902. The bare hills around Burra could easily have been the rolling veldt and pastures of South Africa, and the heritage listed homes and town buildings provided a stunning backdrop to the drama of Harry Morant and the Bushveldt Carbineers.

I arrived in Burra late in the afternoon on the day before my scene was to be filmed. The town was buzzing with film people, trucks, vans and equipment that was totally incongruous with the heritage buildings along the main street. There were men also wandering around in soldier's uniforms, looking decidedly dusty and battle weary. They had just completed the day's shoot – the exploding of the jail – and everyone was heading to the hotel boardroom to watch the rushes before dinner. These were the raw film footage shot during the day, prior to being sent off for editing. They were watched with great interest by the creative team and the main cast members. I stood shyly at the back, eagerly taking it all in.

Once the rushes had finished everyone headed off in many different directions. I made my way to the Burra Hotel as I had been allocated a room on the first floor. I was due in makeup and wardrobe by 7 o'clock the next morning, but try as I might, it was hard to sleep that night.

Despite the early start in makeup and wardrobe, the hairdressers had a tough time completing all the preparations for the 'extras'. My own hair and make-up took nearly four hours to complete. They did a thorough job straightening out my permed hair with large rollers, and with much teasing had created a period hairstyle suitable for my scene in a parlour for an after-dinner entertainment.

As soon as we were done, we were whisked away to the location – a beautiful, heritage house on the only hill in Burra. Overlooking the town and the surrounding plains, this home belonged to the town’s doctor, but had been ‘borrowed’ by the South Australian Film Corporation for the shooting of the movie. A dozen technical people milled around the front lawn, mixing with actors in period costumes and Boer war uniforms. It added to my excitement to see this level of activity and realise that I was part of a real-life film set. It was hard to work out the hierarchy in the crowd as everyone sipped on the same hot drinks and ate the same sandwiches provided out of the catering van. It seemed everyone was working together and knew their role in the well-oiled operation.

“We need some volunteers to do a scene with hands,” called out one of the production managers consulting their clipboard.

A few volunteers came forward immediately. I was too slow off the mark and had not realised what was going on. I was milling about in costume with the other extras waiting for our particular scene to be shot. They were shooting a scene that needed some hands only and I would have been happy to do something else. As it was, we had to wait another two hours before they were ready for our scene.

Some of the other extras seemed to be old hands at this movie-making business. They had been part of other South Australian Film Corporation projects and sat lounging on the front verandah with an air of calm and nonchalance. Most were content to wait their turn, knowing full well that there was more waiting than filming on days such as these.

I had no such patience. I was determined to remember every detail of the experience. My mind was fully alert and I paced around the rooms of the house that we were allowed in, drinking in all the details of actors, technicians, cameramen, people with clipboards, people with coffee cups – I was in awe of it all.

“Do you think I could ask Jack Thompson for a photo?” I asked one of the women waiting in the ‘extras’ room.

“Why not,” she replied, goading me on and pointing the way to the room where the lead actors were lounging around, laughing and filling in time while the ‘hands scene’ was being shot.

I made my way to the room and stood tentatively at the door. Dressed in my period gown of black satin and cream lace, with my hair swept up into an elegant knot, I tried to act sophisticated and older than my twenty years.

“Sure,” he replied after my shy interjection. I sidled up to Jack Thompson, one of Australia’s most respected actors and he immediately put his arm around me to pose for the photo.

“Thanks so much,” I replied.

I was on a high, and moved out to the verandah to see who else would pose for a photo. Edward Woodward was on the verandah. Buoyed by my success in getting a photo with Jack Thompson, I was confident in asking for his photo too. He recognised me from the recording studio and was happy to pose with me at his side. As I was standing an inch or two taller than him, he was quick to get onto his toes just as the camera clicked, ensuring his head evened up with my piled high hair-do.

Soon after we were gathered in the parlour for the filming of our scene. Seated on the settee were an older couple, elegantly dressed in eveningwear circa 1900, and a beautiful younger woman who was playing Harry Morant’s English fiancée. Behind her stood a debonair man, who was playing her father, and all of them faced towards the fireplace where Edward Woodward as Harry Morant, smartly dressed in a dinner suit, stood ready to sing them a parlour song. I was seated at the piano in the corner, side-on to the rest of the onlookers.

We waited for over fifteen minutes as the cameraman adjusted the light levels and the camera exposure. I had no idea there would be this level of complexity to film a single scene. No wonder the ‘hand scene’ had taken so long to complete. The piano had been muted so that even as I played the keys, no sound was produced. We were to mime to the sound track that had been recorded in the Norwood studio.

As the director called for action and the camera starting rolling, the music played through the loud speakers into the room. It was a weird sensation to mime

to the sound track, but after the initial nerves, I was pleased that we only had the visuals to worry about. There was no need to work with the singer to ensure good balance and accurate ensemble. That had been taken care of. My only fear was that I would over act. I worked hard to ensure my playing was totally normal for the style of the song and to look like I was having a good time. I had previously seen myself in videos as I played the piano and I often had this bored, blank expression on my face, even though I might actually be concentrating quite hard on the music. I assumed a slight smile, not a huge cheesy grin, and tried to imagine myself as part of this parlour party, providing some after dinner entertainment for the high-class guests.

The camera's lens moved across the faces in the room. There was no way of knowing when the camera would focus on you, so it was just a matter of playing the part throughout. Reflecting back on the scene, I noted that as 'extras' we were not given any specific directions from the director. We knew the scene and its intent, but the rest was up to us. The whole scene was filmed only twice and before we knew it we were done.

The mini-bus took us back to town where we returned our costumes at make-up and wardrobe. I left my beautiful hair intact and my makeup on as I said my farewells and drove home to Adelaide. It was going to be some time before the 'rushes' would be shown for the day, so I didn't hang around to see the raw footage. I had no overnight accommodation and a two-hour drive ahead of me. It had been a truly memorable day. I had the photos to prove it had happened and the memories to ponder over.

The film was released to great acclaim several months later and was soon deemed to be an Australian classic. As an 'extra' in the film I did not get an invite to any premiere event, and had to wait until I went to the cinema to see what had happened to my scene. I had no idea where it came in the movie, but I was alerted to it when I heard the piano introduction. I felt so tense and nervous as the scene began – it was almost like performing live and in person. The camera panned across my face as I played the piano and rested firstly on Harry Morant and then his adoring fiancée. And then it ended. My brush with fame was over, and the story resumed. It took me a while to get my head back into the film and resume my composure. I wanted to see the scene again and again, just to

check every detail – but that would have to wait until the video release many years later.

The release of the film *Breaker Morant* had quite an impact on my social circle. I knew many people who had been involved as ‘extras,’ especially in the many battle scenes. After viewing the movie, many of them reported that their scenes had just ended up ‘on the cutting room floor,’ casualties of the post-filming editing process.

My film experience created quite a stir among my university friends. Word had spread quickly that I had been in the film, and everyone was keen to see my friendly pictures with the leading actors. Many of my student friends were so impressed that my experience overshadowed that of one of my peers who had reached the state final of the ABC Instrumental and Vocal competition⁴⁵. He was due to play with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, but I had played in a movie – that seemed much more impressive and caused much more table talk in the university common room.

Part 18

During my years as a student at the Elder Conservatorium of Music I had many opportunities to accompany instrumentalists. I regularly accompanied students who played the oboe, violin, flute and French horn. We worked on recital and exam programs exploring some very challenging repertoire. The student instrumentalists had to source their own accompanists for their exams and recitals, as this was not a service provided by the conservatorium staff. Hence, at the beginning of the year pianists who were willing to accompany were snatched up fast and put to work.

⁴⁵ The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) co-ordinate an annual competition for young instrumental and vocal performers. Beginning in 1944 as a state-based competition it grew into the ABC Concerto and Vocal Competition. In 1968 its name changed to the Instrumental and Vocal Competition and by 1978 it included four categories, String, Vocal, Keyboard and Other Instruments. The competition is held in four stages – two recitals with piano accompaniment and two performances with Australian symphony orchestras. At each stage the number of competitors is reduced until by Stage III only four performers remain in each category (String, Keyboard and Other Instrumental). The winner of each category receives a cash prize and progresses to the Grand Final, Stage IV (Inglis, 2006a, 2006b).

“Do you have any space for me in your diary?” asked Joanne who had just arrived breathless into the Elder Conservatorium student common room carrying her violin case across her back.

It was blowing a cold wind outside as the early days of autumn had arrived in Adelaide making it quite desirable to seek the warmth of the indoors. The conservatorium student common room was a warm and friendly room, frequently filled with chatting students sitting amidst instrument cases, bags and even the occasional bicycle perched against the bag racks.

I had been waiting in the common room between classes as I found it much more congenial than braving the winds that whistled around the tall buildings of the university campus. I consulted the little black diary that contained my life.

“Sounds fine to me. What are you wanting to play?”

She passed me the music to Brahms’ second sonata for violin in A major⁴⁶. I had been very fond of Brahms ever since I had been introduced to his *Rhapsody* Opus 79 No. 2 in G minor. I was very keen to explore more of his music and I had heard that this particular sonata was very beautiful. I also knew that anything Brahms wrote for piano would be difficult and demanding. Brahms’ music frequently includes complicated chord passages and sweeping melodic lines that demand great technical skill of the player as well as an acute musical understanding of the Romantic style. We made an appointment to meet the following week and begin work on it together.

After several rehearsals together, we were ready to take it to her teacher. I was keen to make a good impression and was therefore quite apprehensive about playing this demanding work in the lesson.

We began with a run through of the first movement and then the real work began. Her teacher did not just consider Joanne’s performance but was keen to make us work as a team and listen to each other. One of the interesting aspects of sonata performance, and in particular the sonatas by Brahms, is that the composer gives equal importance to both parts. Each performer takes it in turn to

⁴⁶ Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) wrote three sonatas for violin and piano. The A major sonata, Opus 100 was composed in 1886 is considered one of his most musically accessible works (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

lead the musical development of the work with the phrases passing between each player throughout the work's progress. We worked phrase by phrase pulling the music apart to gain as much of the expressiveness as possible from this nineteenth century Romantic work. I returned to quite a few of Joanne's lessons before her exam and by then we had become a real team, listening to each other and feeding off each other's musical impulses and cues.

These skills stood me in good stead with not only my accompaniment work but also in chamber music performance. While I was at the Conservatorium, chamber music groups tended to be formed by the students themselves rather than by the staff, with the lecturers encouraging us to explore the vast amount of chamber music repertoire. There were ample opportunities to perform in lunch-hour concerts, and chamber music performances were a strong part of many of these concert programs. I performed chamber music by Johannes Brahms and Ludwig van Beethoven, as well as works by twentieth century composers such as Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg. These chamber works all featured instrumentalists including string, woodwind and brass players.

However, during my university years, I had very limited opportunities to work with singers. They seemed to be a world apart from the instrumentalists – they had their own special workshops and master classes and since their daily timetable did not often coincide with the instrumentalists, we had little to do with them, even on a social level. It was not until I graduated and moved to Queensland with my new husband, following him to his permanent job, that I began my accompaniment in earnest with singers. Little did I know then, that my work with singers would eventually occupy most of my time as an accompanist.

Part 19

The move to Queensland took me out of my comfort zone musically. I no longer had any of the contacts that I had carefully cultivated in the Adelaide music scene. Some of my friends thought I was foolishly giving away my music career. But rather than giving it away, it just moved in a new direction. Piano accompaniment became an even more important part of my musical life. There

were few opportunities to perform as a soloist but the opportunities to work as an accompanist expanded significantly.

One of the earliest opportunities came when I was asked me to be the accompanist for a large community choir. They had a long history emanating out the Welsh community that had settled west of Brisbane in the late nineteenth century to mine the large deposits of coal deep below the surface of the Ipswich-Redbank area. Some of the choir members had Welsh names and a few could still speak the ancient Celtic dialect. It seems I arrived just as their previous accompanist had retired and they were game enough to take on a young newcomer to town who had just graduated with a performance degree in music.

Beginning in February, I soon settled in to work with the choir towards their first challenge for the year – the Queensland Eisteddfod, held every Easter in southeast Queensland. Since the choir sang in the A-grade sections of the Eisteddfod, the music was very difficult, both for the choir and for the accompanist. I found I had to use all my piano skills to adequately perform what were often orchestral reductions of large choral works from oratorios or operas. The choir numbered up to eighty members, and I had to match them with a sound that would support their singing and capture the intent and style of the music.

My very first performance at the Easter Eisteddfod was with the men's chorus. The choir did not have a very large men's chorus, and the rival choirs at the eisteddfod often outnumbered them. They entered the competition as the 'underdogs,' a place they had 'earned' it seemed, from a lack of success in previous years. All the choirs were to sing the same song – *Granada*⁴⁷. Our men's chorus was first.

"Go get them Judith!" whispered June, one of the choir's sopranos, as we made our way to the stage.

The ladies were seated at the back of the hall and had all come along to give moral support to the men of the choir. The only two females making their way to the front were our conductress, Grace and myself.

⁴⁷ *Granada* is a popular song by the Mexican composer Agustin Lara (1897 – 1970). The song has been recorded by many artists since its composition in 1932 including Frankie Laine, Mario Lanza and Frank Sinatra (Morales, 2003).

“I’ll try,” I replied nervously as I followed the men to the stage.

I knew that there had been a lot of whispered discussion amongst the other choirs about “the new pianist” for our choir. I did not realise at the time that these eisteddfods were hotly contested events among the choirs and any changes in conductors or accompanists were duly noted and judged critically during the competition.

The men settled on the choir stands and I took my place at the grand piano placed in front of the choir. I was concentrating intently, watching Grace for her cue and the music for the introduction I was about to play.

She gave me the nod. I took a deep breath and launched into the introduction with as much gusto and panache as I could muster. The introduction to *Grenada* is almost like a *cadenza*⁴⁸ from a concerto and it was my moment to shine as a pianist before taking the more supportive role of accompanist while the men sang. But somehow the introduction did more than just set the scene for the song. The men captured the *bravura*⁴⁹ of my playing and sang like they had never sung before. Their sound reverberated through the hall and back to us on the stage. We could all feel it was exhilarating and it further spurred on Grace as she encouraged the men to give not only their voices but also their souls. I was able to sense this too. The spirit of their singing, together with the excitement of the music itself enabled me to push and pull the phrases, bringing out every nuance of musicality from the harmony, melodic interludes and the exuberant Spanish rhythm that underpinned the whole work.

It was all over in a flash and we were greeted with rapturous applause not only from our own choir but also from everyone else in the hall. We had set a high standard. We had captured the spirit of the song with a daring and emotionally raw performance and I was part of that performance. It was not just a case of merely accompanying the choir while they sang, but together we made music on the stage. In that instant, we had taken the song and created ‘art’.

⁴⁸ A *cadenza* is a passage of music that often appears near the end of a concerto movement. It is usually virtuosic in style allowing the soloist in the concerto to demonstrate their technical prowess. A *cadenza* is often played with some freedom in the tempo so that the drama of the music can be heightened (Scholes, 1970).

⁴⁹ *Bravura* is an Italian term meaning skill or bravery. Music played with *bravura* displays an element of brilliant display (Turek, 1996).

June and the other ladies of the choir were beaming as we took our place, and I could see a few eyes watching me as I sat with the choir at the back of the hall. The new accompanist had shown her stuff, and she had injected a new lease of life into the men's chorus. Grace was very pleased – taking on a young pianist had proved to be a good idea and I proved I could continue the work done in rehearsal through to the actual competition performance where it counted.

The men's chorus went on to win that section – for the first time in many years. The choir was elated and throughout the rest of the Eisteddfod, they won several other sections. Even when they did not get first place, they sang with confidence and energy. We had developed into a team. Our leader, Grace, drove the artistic vision for each piece of music. I began to feel I was not just the accompanist but also an integral part of the artistic realisation in each performance. The music was more than just a collection of 'dots' on the page. It was a dynamic work of art that came to life with the right combination of technical skill, accuracy, attention to detail of phrasing and dynamics, but also a commitment from each performer to give of themselves.

Part 20

My role as accompanist for this community choir also opened up opportunities to accompany many of the members in their solo vocal sections at the annual Queensland Eisteddfod each Easter. I found accompanying the singers to be intensely satisfying, and often enjoyed playing for them more than for instrumentalists. Many of these singers were very vulnerable as musicians. They instinctively knew their music, but were very uncertain about its theoretical and technical characteristics. They relied on me to look after these technical details and ensure they were taken care of in the performances.

One such singer was Oliver. He possessed a booming bass voice and he played a vital role in the back row of the choir keeping everyone in tune as he confidently resounded the bass lines in each of the choral works. Oliver was one of the first choir members to ask me if I would accompany him in his solo sections. He usually entered all the first-grade sections including bass solo, ballad, oratorio, operatic aria and lieder. The Eisteddfod had an official

accompanist who was available for any of the soloists (and I was in awe of her brilliant sight reading and accompaniment skills – she was an institution with the Queensland Eisteddfod having accompanied for more years than anyone cared to remember), but Oliver seemed willing to give me a go as I approached my second Queensland Eisteddfod with the choir.

“Here’s the music Judith,” said Oliver as he passed me a wad of manuscripts at one of the choir rehearsals. “We’ll only need one run through before the Eisteddfod.”

I must have looked a little shocked.

“Okay, we can practice a couple of times,” reassured Oliver.

And that was that.

Oliver was a man of few words, but when it came to singing, he was larger than life. Our first rehearsal was a week or two before the Eisteddfod. He was singing the bass aria *La vendetta* from Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*⁵⁰. It begins quite steadily, but soon includes fast patter sections for the singer and semiquaver passages for the piano that move at a rapid rate. I was playing a piano reduction⁵¹ from the orchestral score. Many of these reductions do not really suit the piano and are often incredibly difficult to play exactly as written.

Oliver was both a pleasure and a challenge to accompany. Oliver always told the story of the song and was extremely skilled as a vocal communicator. The audiences loved his performances and he was always placed first, second or third in each section he competed in. However, unknown to most of the audience, he often took great liberties with the prescribed tempo so that he could expand upon the drama of the work. It didn’t help matters that I was unfamiliar with many of his songs and so I kept getting caught out with his tempo changes.

⁵⁰ *The Marriage of Figaro* is a comic opera in four acts written in 1784 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte after the play by Beaumarchais. *La vendetta* is sung by Bartolo near the beginning of Act One. Bartolo (bass) is a doctor and swears vengeance on Figaro whom he believes thwarted his plans to marry Rosina (who is now the Countess married to the Count) (Kobbe, 1989).

⁵¹ A piano reduction is a piano version or an orchestral score arranged on two staves to play on the piano. Many of these reductions include more notes than are physically possible to play and the pianist is often forced to simplify sections that become unplayable at full speeds (Katz, 2009).

Neither did he wait for me. Oliver sang on regardless of where I was and it was clear he was in charge of all his musical performances.

Fortunately, he was patient with me and I soon learnt to follow him. In fact, the skills I gained working with Oliver stood me in good stead for vocal accompaniment in general. I learned early on that not only did I have to be aware of my own music part, but I also had to diligently follow the vocal line to ensure we were actually staying together. I had to learn to listen for the breathing of the singer and synchronise my part to their interpretation. As I had learnt many years before, the singer was the one treading the boards. I had to support them in their performance and provide them with the security of an accurate performance that was empathetic to their interpretative journey.

Part 21

It was actually my work accompanying a singer that drew me to the attention of the staff at a regional conservatorium of music. On arrival, my husband and I had been shown the campus during our initial tour of this regional city but at that stage I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to perform there. I had just spent the last four and a half years living in western Queensland, raising a young family and doing a bit of piano teaching and some performing at community concerts. It had been some time since I had really been stretched musically and artistically.

When we arrived in this city I had come across an old friend, Keith, who had been part of the community choir I had accompanied years before. He had been one of the singers I had accompanied in the Queensland Eisteddfod and was now studying classical voice at this regional conservatorium. He was keen to work with me again and so in the New Year we started rehearsing songs for the Easter Eisteddfod. The tradition of having an eisteddfod during the Easter break was also strong in the north Queensland region, and soon after our arrival, the North Queensland Eisteddfod was held in our local city. It was good to escape some of the domestic duties to make music again (I was expecting our third child) and Keith was an excellent musician to work with.

His repertoire was very challenging and included arias from an oratorio and an opera, as well as challenging lied⁵² by Franz Liszt⁵³ entitled *Die Lorelei*⁵⁴. The song we worked on had a particularly difficult piano part but that was to be expected of the piano music of Franz Liszt. The song told the story of a ship in a violent storm and so the piano part featured a fast rolling left hand part and crashing, thunderous chords that set the scene for the story as told by the singer. Liszt was a virtuoso performer himself in the nineteenth century and his piano works are renowned for their extreme technical difficulty. This work was a real challenge for me and I was eager to demonstrate I was up to the task.

After a couple of rehearsals on our own we ventured to perform the works in front of his teacher, Muriel, who was the vocal teacher at the regional conservatorium. Although I was initially quite nervous about performing in front of her, her friendly and welcoming manner soon put me at ease. After working on Keith's songs for most of the lesson, Muriel was keen to find out more about me. She had her finger on the city's musical pulse and so a new pianist in town was of great interest to her. She had a large studio of singing students who were studying at the conservatorium as well as community members who came to her for singing lessons. Not being a pianist herself, she employed pianists to accompany her students in all their lessons. This enabled her to give her students her full attention to work on their singing technique and to develop the whole performance, singer and accompanist, in all aspects of the music.

“Would you be interested in doing some more accompanying for the Eisteddfod Judith?” she asked as we were leaving.

⁵² *Lied* is the German word for song. It most commonly refers to compositions written in the nineteenth century where the piano and voice are of equal importance. In many of these works the piano part is quite descriptive providing an important atmospheric background to the vocal part, helping to evoke the emotive qualities of the song as well as enhance the story-telling of the lyrics (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

⁵³ Franz Liszt (1811–1886) was a Hungarian pianist, teacher and composer. He wrote over 80 songs but these are hardly ever performed in lieder recitals. The songs display the same levels of virtuosity in the piano and vocal line as his more well known piano works (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

⁵⁴ *Die Lorelei* is Franz Liszt's 1841 setting of the Heinrich Heine's poem of the same name. The story is based on the German legend of a beautiful woman who sings on a mountain by the Rhine, luring sailors to their death on the rocks below (Scholes, 1970). The song contains harmonic language similar to the German composer Richard Wagner (1813 – 1833) particularly in the opening piano introduction where Liszt uses the same harmony that is later used by Wagner in the opening of his 1857 opera *Tristan und Isolde* (Millington, 1992).

I must have looked quite positive, as she was quick to continue.

“I have quite a few students singing in the oratorio⁵⁵ section and my studio accompanist Cheryl would greatly appreciate someone helping her out with this section in particular.”

Within a few days, I called back at Muriel’s studio and Cheryl eagerly handed me a large pile of folders each containing sheet music for various pieces for the oratorio section.

“I am so glad you like playing oratorios,” she said with a wry smile. “I like playing everything else, but I can easily give oratorios a miss.”

During the next week the phone calls came and before long I was rehearsing with up to a dozen singers, ploughing my way through the complicated music that each of them were performing in the oratorio section at the Eisteddfod. I found this extremely exhilarating – I was back playing challenging music again after a few years devoted to child-rearing and family commitments. Many of these pieces were by Baroque composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel and Antonio Vivaldi, so in themselves, they were beautiful works, full of exquisite melody and harmonic structure. The accompaniments were orchestral reductions, which made them even more difficult and challenging to perform effectively on just a piano. I also enjoyed working with a large group of performers. The fact that I had little time to spend on each piece meant that I had to develop strategies for quick learning. There was usually only time for one or two rehearsals and in that brief time we had to establish a rapport as a collaborative team, decide on our approach to the style of the music with respect to its phrasing, dynamic shape and rhythmic drive as well as the basics such as playing all the correct notes.

The solo vocal sections of the North Queensland Eisteddfod were held at the city’s entertainment centre and this was the first time I performed on this stage. It had been a long time since I had set foot on a large stage to perform, but

⁵⁵ On *oratorio* is a piece of music performed by an orchestra, choir and several vocal soloists. Using the same formal structure of an opera, an oratorio will usually begin with an overture for orchestra and include recitatives and arias for the vocal soloists interspersed with choral pieces. An oratorio does not use the staging or costuming as seen in opera and is usually based on a Biblical theme. The music is often at the same level of difficulty as operatic writing (Scholes, 1970).

with so many oratorio arias to perform, almost one after the other, I soon lost my nerves and got on with the task of creating music. Not all the oratorio performances were as good in performance as in rehearsal and I had to work hard to support the singers as they dealt with their performance nerves. It took a great deal of concentration to stay totally focused for each individual performance throughout the afternoon. The sense of personal satisfaction at the end was a reward for me. I knew I had given each performer a musical performance that was true to the style of the work that supported them in their interpretation and helped them overcome their own performance anxiety.

It felt good to be challenged in this way and I was looking forward to performing the Liszt *lied* with Keith later that weekend. In the *lieder*⁵⁶ section of the eisteddfod the pianist and singer are both judged equally, acknowledging the role that each part plays in this style of music. Our Liszt *lied* had significant impact. Keith's strong tenor voice was more than capable of being heard above the thunderous accompaniment and the conclusion of the performance was met with enthusiastic applause. We went on to win the section and this sparked considerable interest among the music community gathered about the 'new pregnant pianist lady.' I was hard to miss for at this stage I was about seven months pregnant, but I could still comfortably sit at the keyboard and play. The combination of playing for the oratorio section and making an impact with a performance of a difficult *lied* led to many comments after the performance. The positive feedback gave me great personal encouragement as an accompanist and interpreter of challenging classical repertoire.

Shortly after the birth of our third child, I received a letter from the director of the conservatorium inviting me to her office to 'have a chat.' Sensing this was more like an interview than a chat, I prepared myself with copies of my qualifications and curriculum vitae and presented myself at her office at the appointed time. She had heard about my playing at the eisteddfod and my work with Muriel's students. It had obviously made some impact on her and she invited me to do more accompaniment work at the conservatorium on a contract basis. I was thrilled and took up the offer with pleasure but a little trepidation.

⁵⁶ *Lieder* is the plural of *lied* (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

Within a month I was accompanying brass students who were preparing for their end of semester performance examinations. The repertoire was extremely challenging as most of it was by twentieth century composers. These pieces place great demands on the solo performers as well as the accompanists as they are often very challenging rhythmically and harmonically. These composers have written works that demand strong playing from the pianist to match the intense sounds of the brass solo players and so I had to physically work very hard throughout the rehearsals and performances to fulfill these demands.

The conservatorium was also presenting a performance of Menotti's opera *The Medium*⁵⁷ that year. Within a month of starting as a casual accompanist, I was thrust into rehearsals for this twentieth century opera, which also presented many challenges rhythmically and harmonically. The opera was performed with a small instrumental ensemble and the piano part was for duo pianists – four hands at one keyboard. I was performing with one of the students as the other set of hands, and in a very short time we had to learn to work together in a confined space and balance our sound with the rest of the ensemble.

These new challenges gave me a new sense of purpose as a musician. I felt I had now crossed a threshold from amateur to professional. I knew I still had much to learn to increase my technical abilities and incorporate new ideas about musical style and interpretation, but as I met these new challenges and my skill levels grew, I felt more confident to explore new directions and take my piano accompaniment playing to the next level. Juggling the demands of professional work and a young family was not without its challenges, and a baby in a pram often accompanied me to rehearsals with the students during that first year. My part time accompaniment work had to be carefully balanced with my role as a mother. I had to be very organised to manage these demands on my time but I was determined to make the most of this professional opportunity even while my children were young.

⁵⁷ The one-act opera *The Medium* by Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti (1911–2007) was first performed in 1946 (Kobbe, 1989).

Part 22

Not all my accompaniment experiences remain vividly in my memory, but there have been a number of seminal performances over the years that have remained clear as they represented turning points in my development as an accompanist. I had been a piano accompanist for music theatre for many years but the opportunity to work with professionals in this genre took me to the next level in my development.

During the second year of my work at the regional conservatorium I was asked to accompany one of the part-time staff members, Courtney, who was to present a vocal recital. The director of the conservatorium was keen to diversify the types of concerts presented as part of the annual events program and Courtney was excited to present her newly gained insights into the music theatre repertoire. Although Courtney had spent much of her youth in this city, she had recently returned from London where she had studied some of the more recent music theatre repertoire. The full-time piano lecturer had turned down this performance opportunity as music theatre was totally unfamiliar territory to her, but I felt I was coming back to my roots as a teenage pianist playing for musicals in my hometown.

This recital marked the beginning of a new phase in my music theatre journey. We worked hard on the repertoire with quite a few long rehearsals together. It was important to get to know each other as performers and as the accompanist I had to come to understand Courtney both as a musician and as an interpreter. She was never afraid to dig deep into the meaning of the lyrics and use her wide range of vocal colours to tap into the emotions of the song.

This was particularly evident in her performance of *How Could I Ever Know* from *The Secret Garden*⁵⁸. As with many of the songs presented in this recital, it was totally new to me. I was familiar with many of the musicals written in the

⁵⁸ *The Secret Garden* with music by Lucy Simon and book and lyrics by Marsha Norman premiered on Broadway in 1991 and closed after 709 performances in 1993. The story is based on the 1911 novel of the same name by Frances Hodgson Burnett (Larkin, 1999). The ghost of Lily, Archibald's wife, encouraging him to reconnect with his estranged young son Colin and niece Mary over whom he has guardianship, sings *How Could I Ever Know* near the end of Act Two (McLamore, 2004).

1960s and 1970s but the show had only just recently closed on Broadway and this was probably the first public performance in our city of one of the songs from this musical. It is a heartfelt song and works easily in recital as it recounts the sense of loss that comes from bereavement yet looks forward to a life that is reconciled and accepting of the grief. As we got to know each other on a personal level and feel comfortable with each other as performers, we both started to empathise with the dramatic journey presented in the song. Lucy Simon's music was particularly well suited to the story, building strongly to the same climactic points as the lyrics. Given the closeness we had developed in our musical partnership, the performance of this song in particular was one of those spine-tingling moments when all elements of the performance came together perfectly and remains vivid in my memory.

A year later, there was a weekend music theatre seminar that brought to the conservatorium some of Australia's top music theatre performers, music directors and actors. It was a heady weekend as staff and students were inspired during the various master classes and workshops with these consummate professionals. As the resident accompanist for the music theatre program, my role was to accompany the students in the master class performances. A significant bonus for me was the feedback I received from the music director regarding my performance as an accompanist.

"You know, you don't have to play all those dots on the page," he pointed out to me after one student's performance.

He moved onto the piano and began the introduction to the song encouraging the singer to repeat their performance. The priority was not the exact notes but rather the rhythmic feel of the music – sometimes he added extra notes, sometimes he left notes out.

"How do you know what to play and what not to play?" I asked him after the session had finished.

He laughed.

"Some of these arrangements are just so terrible. They give no support to the singer at all. You have to go with your instincts."

It was exactly what I needed to hear. I had been given permission to take these music theatre accompaniments and treat them differently to the classical music I had spent such a lot of time learning and performing. I was not beholden to the score but was instead bound by the style and the performance itself. I could add and subtract musical material provided that the style of the music was not compromised and the singers for whom I was playing could do their job and interpret the song in a meaningful way.

I had actually been doing this for a while, often enhancing the accompaniment with small rhythmic and melodic embellishments, but I always felt guilty for not being totally faithful to the written score. Such was my training in classical music that I had a high respect for the composer's intentions as provided on the written score. I had to learn, albeit slowly, that the composer's intention was not always represented on the written score. Some music theatre scores are cluttered up with extra notes representing the cues for other orchestral instruments. Known as 'short scores', they are often used by conductors and musical directors as they provide an overview of the vocal and orchestral arrangement of the musical. The extra notes written over these scores can be confusing for the accompanist and distracting from the presentation of an authentic performance of the song. Scores of some music theatre and contemporary popular songs are over simplified, omitting important elements such as rhythmic groove and the symbols indicating attack and phrase. These arrangements need to be enhanced by the accompanist with extra notes, chords and rhythmic patterns in keeping with the style of the work itself. Regardless of the type of musical score I was working from, my job as accompanist is to be faithful to intent of the composer, the style of the music and to use all available sources of information, including scores and recordings of seminal performances, to devise an accompaniment suitable for each performer and each performance situation.

Part 23

Accompaniment can be a very emotional experience. The close collaboration that grows from this type of musical partnership is seldom spoken

in words. The music itself can be a potent force for changing moods, expressing inner emotions and these moments can occur at any time – sometimes in the privacy of the studio and sometimes in performance.

One such experience that I had underscores the role of music to reach into the soul and provide comfort. I began the day in a dark mood. I had been rushing from home, where I had three young children to get ready for the day, to get to the studio where I was to accompany students in their vocal lessons and the last thing I really wanted to do at that time was to play supportively for the students. My life was getting too busy and too frantic and this accompanying work seemed just another burden.

The lesson began with a piece by Vivaldi, from his oratorio *Gloria*.⁵⁹ And then something very interesting happened. The *Domine Deus*⁶⁰ begins with a simple melody in a lilting rhythm in compound quadruple⁶¹ time. It has a long introduction that sets the mood of the whole piece. When faced with long introductions of pieces of music that are actually orchestral reductions, I would usually cut out most of the solo and reduce the introduction to about four bars. In some classical pieces, especially concerto movements, these introductions can be very long, leaving the soloist feeling quite uncomfortable standing on the stage waiting for their solo moment to arrive. But this day I played it all and found its simplicity of harmonic structure and gently undulating rhythm both calming and meditative. As I began to accompany the singer my mood lifted and everything that had seemed so burdensome just fell away. I noticed a distinct change in my mood. The music was so beautiful in itself and the combination of playing this music with another human being, who also understood the style and appreciated the artistic quality of this music, touched me deeply. I could feel myself getting quite emotional and struggled to control my feelings and continue playing. As we reached the end we both commented on our performance. It was in rehearsal, early in the day and no audience save the teacher had been there to witness it but

⁵⁹ Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) was an Italian composer most famous for his concertos for the violin. He also wrote operas and sacred choral works. The *Gloria* RV 589 is one of three choral and orchestral settings of the *Gloria* composed by Vivaldi. This setting is his most popular and is often performed at Christmas (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

⁶⁰ The *Domine Deus* is the sixth movement in the *Gloria* and is sung by a soprano solo (Scholes, 1970).

⁶¹ Compound quadruple is the formal name for 12/8 time (Turek, 1996).

the power of music to communicate emotion had been clearly evident in those few minutes.

I experienced a similar feeling when accompanying Muriel, the full-time voice lecturer at the conservatorium, in one of her rare solo recitals. She had a heavy face-to-face teaching load during the term that left little time for her own performance preparation and so, after much encouragement from her colleagues at the conservatorium, she finally agreed to do a recital of art songs⁶² at the beginning of the year, before the exhaustion of vocal teaching became too overwhelming. In this program we performed a song cycle *Over the Rim of the Moon* by Michael Head⁶³ and set of songs by Rachmaninoff⁶⁴. Muriel was a very accomplished singer and the Romantic style evident in the work of both of these composers suited her voice quality and allowed her to tap into rich emotional territory.

Since the Rachmaninoff songs were not part of an actual song cycle or other set of songs, Muriel took the time during the concert to explain the content and context of each song before she performed it. They were all sung in English, rather than the original Russian, and they all dealt with human emotions. During our rehearsals we had not really discussed the backgrounds of each of the songs and had spent our time exploring the musical imperatives of tempo, dynamic, phrasing and attack.

Her remarks to the audience about the third song, *O sing no more*, took me completely by surprise. When Muriel explained that it was written as a lament of a mother for her lost child, I suddenly gained new understanding of the depth of emotion buried in this song. As we began the performance I found myself

⁶² An art song is a song intended for concert performance and, like the German *lied*, places equal emphasis on both the piano and vocal parts. The piano part is often used by the composer to create a tonal landscape that enhances the meaning of the lyrics (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

⁶³ Michael Head (1900 – 1976) was a British composer and pianist. *Over the Rim of the Moon* was a set of songs written between 1918 and 1919 with lyrics by Francis Ledwidge. The four songs are *The Ships of Arcady*, *Beloved*, *A Blackbird Singing* and *Nocturne* (Scholes, 1970).

⁶⁴ Serge Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943) was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor. He is most well known for his piano works including four piano concertos, the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra and three symphonies (Scholes, 1970). The songs we performed were *At night*, Opus 4, No. 3, *Morning*, Opus 4, No. 2, *O sing no more*, Opus 4, No. 4, *O thou billowy harvest*, Opus 4, No. 5, *Soldier's Bride*, Opus 8, No. 4 and *Spring's Return*, Opus 14, No. 11.

becoming caught up in the despair of the young mother depicted in the song. My own experience as a mother allowed me to empathise with the story portrayed in these lyrics. Muriel's singing and the exquisite melodic and harmonic language of Rachmaninoff's music transported me to another place and I struggled to read the music through the tears filling my eyes. It is rare to have this sort of intense emotional experience in a performance, as there are often other distractions, most notably endeavouring to play the piece of music correctly, that get in the way of a deep emotional connection. However, this was one of those occasions of intense emotional connection between all the performers and the music itself. The experience lifted the quality of my playing too. Such was the sense of being totally encapsulated by the emotion of the lyrics and the beauty of the musical score.

More recently, I had a similar experience during a rehearsal with a good friend of mine. We had worked together many times before and had already developed a good rapport as singer and accompanist. We were rehearsing a song to sing at her birthday party. The song was one we both enjoyed performing as it spoke of the close human connection in families. The rehearsal space was a light and airy practice studio. Its large window opened to the vista of cane paddocks with the ranges in the distance. As we began to go through the song there was this absolute sense of oneness and empathy that came between us. Everything around us was blocked out except for the performance – the connection between the words and the music – the singer and the accompanist. I began to feel myself starting to cry even before we had finished the song, such was the emotional connection present during that performance.

We discussed how this song seemed to work so well between us, and I was concerned that perhaps at the party I would become too emotional to be able to play the song. We both laughed and agreed that we would need to keep our emotions in check or risk falling apart in front of our friends and family. But that didn't happen. The performance at the party did not have the power of our private rehearsal when we were both open to each other's emotional expression of the music. We were both quite nervous before our performance at the party. There was no reason for this except that we were both performing in an unfamiliar environment in a room with quite a dead acoustic. Suddenly, there

were other factors besides the music to occupy our mind including the fact that I had to get used to a different keyboard and balance our sound as we performed, making sure that I was neither too soft nor too loud for the singer, but providing the right amount of support to create a satisfying performance. The performance drew to a close and was well received by the family and friends present, but we both knew it had none of the emotional intensity of our rehearsal.

Part 24

The Brass Festival at the conservatorium was the first of its kind for our institution. Central to its success was the contribution of several professional players who had come to our city for a week of workshops and master-classes with the students and community. Each evening, these players would also perform as soloists and in small chamber ensembles. The brass ensemble work was to be the highlight of these performances and was designed to inspire the young people who were attending the workshops and master-classes.

About one week out from the start of the Festival, the director had an idea. Why not include in each of these concerts performances of the Hindemith sonatas⁶⁵ for each of the instruments represented at the festival – trumpet, horn, trombone and tuba? They are rarely performed as a set for brass instruments. A performance of this type would add another level of prestige to the week long Festival.

These sonatas provide a great challenge to both the solo instrument and the pianist, as their piano parts are equally as challenging as the solo parts. Being quite atonal in nature, they are also very difficult to sight read as there are none of the usual harmonic progressions one has come to expect in Western classical music that become ‘aural markers’ when you sight read an unfamiliar work. The harmonic landscape develops in quite foreign directions providing, in many cases, intriguing new ways of hearing these orchestral instruments in combination with the piano.

⁶⁵ German composer Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) wrote over twenty-five sonatas including some for violin, viola, cello, flute, saxophone clarinet, oboe, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone and tuba. These are iconic twentieth century works for orchestral instruments (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

As the resident accompanist at the conservatorium, my task was to learn these four sonatas for the brass instruments and perform them, one at each of the evening concerts during the week of the Brass Festival. The Festival program during the day was extensive, so rehearsal with each of the soloists was extremely limited. Furthermore, each player also performed other solo works on the program that needed piano accompaniment.

“I have played the Hindemith trombone sonata before,” I reassured the Festival director. I think I was trying to convince myself that this task would indeed be doable. “I have also played one of the movements from the trumpet sonata, so I am sure I can learn the other sonatas in time.”

“Great,” she replied. “I’ll program them in. When they arrive you’ll have an hour or two in the afternoon to rehearse with them before the concerts, which start at 6 o’clock. I want them to be concerts that come at the end of each day so the students can stay and listen to them rather than going home and coming back again.”

It all sounded good in principle. In reality, it was a daunting experience that I was not going to forget in a long time. The rehearsals were usually less than the two hours set aside for them because the workshops often took longer than expected. The soloists knew their parts well as they had performed the sonatas many times in the past. However, most of the works were quite new to me, and the details of tempo such as the *rubato* and *ritenutos*⁶⁶ as well as the phrasing and dynamics, were hard to master in such a short rehearsal time. It put my sight-reading and quick learning skills to the test. Some of the nuances of the performance could be written down on the score, and this was achieved during our brief rehearsal together. Other less obvious aspects of the interpretation of the piece had to be committed to memory. This was more difficult as I did not know these pieces inside out and had no time to explore them in detail. Due to this, I was only moderately confident that I would be able to perform the works with any level of expertise at the evening concerts.

⁶⁶ *Rubato* literally means ‘robbed time’ and refers to the pulling around of the tempo that musicians add to music to increase the expressiveness of the performance. *Ritenuito* is an Italian term meaning to immediately slow down (Turek, 1996).

The first concert featured the Hindemith trumpet sonata. As I came on stage with the soloist and settled at the piano, I kept reminding myself mentally “just read the music, just read the music.” It was a matter of intensely focusing not only on the written score for the piano part, but also on the written score for the solo part as well as following the performer in front of me. Since I did not know the pieces inside out, I had to rely on the soloist leading the performance and following their musical intentions as well as those of the composer. Using my peripheral vision I needed to intently watch both the score and the performer. Since they were all wind players, their body language and their intake of breath gave important clues to me as accompanist. The players would move their bodies in an unconscious way as they expressed the emotion and intensity of the music. It was my job to find a way to work with them, even though the exact placing of my breath is not essential to my performance of the piano part. Just as with singers, I found myself breathing with the wind players, allowing the phrases to be shaped by their breath. At times the rhythm was strict and our breath had to become short and sharp – quick intakes between the accented and driving melodies. At other times the rhythm took a more relaxed path and so our breath could be drawn in more slowly to match the melodic shape of each lyrical phrase.

The Hindemith sonatas are highly structured and dense works. They are not a ‘walk in the park’ for the performers, nor are they ‘easy listening’ for the audience. We came to the end of the concert without a major mishap. But that was only the first concert. I went home that evening, had a cup of coffee and began frantically rehearsing the next sonata. After an hour or two of practice, trying to work out some basic fingering and get my head around the rhythmic and harmonic structures, I resorted to a glass of wine to calm me down before going to sleep. It was a pattern I was to repeat all of that week. By the end of the Festival I was mentally and physically exhausted. Accompanying these artists in each of the evening concerts, and especially tackling four Hindemith sonatas in four consecutive concerts was an example of sight-reading and just-in-time learning at an extreme level. I had never been exposed to this type of speed learning yet it did provide a type of adrenalin rush almost akin to extreme sports.

Not that I was an extreme sportsperson – just an accompanist keen to take on an extreme challenge.

Part 25

Having successfully negotiated the works of Hindemith, I began to gain a reputation for being able to tackle difficult instrumental accompaniments. The most difficult accompaniment I ever tackled was the *Sonata for Flute and Piano* by the Australian composer Richard Meale⁶⁷. This sonata is rarely heard in performance with few flute players having the technique to master its extreme rhythmic and harmonic challenges. Written using the twelve-tone system of composition that had originally been devised by Arnold Schoenberg⁶⁸ during the 1920s and had been adopted and adapted by a large number of composers throughout the western world in the twentieth century, Meale had created a work of great complexity requiring extreme precision in all aspects of its musical language.

The soloist for the recital was one of Australia's leading flautists. He had a prestigious career as a symphony orchestra flute player and also as a member of several professional ensembles around Australia. I felt privileged to work with him on this sonata and was prepared to work very hard to meet his musical standards. We had only two days to get the concert program together, so our rehearsals were long and intense, matching the difficulty of the piece we were preparing. The first movement featured an extremely loud passage using the lowest bass notes on the piano in heavy cluster chords. These were to be played sharply accented in a syncopated rhythm that never synchronized with the flute part. I had been struggling to get this complex rhythmic and harmonic structure even close to accurate and my partner sensed my frustration.

⁶⁷ Australian composer, Richard Meale (1932–2009) wrote the *Sonata for Flute and Piano* in 1960 (Ford, 1993). In this sonata he makes use of avant-garde compositional techniques of serialism that were not well known in Australia at this time.

⁶⁸ Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) was an Austro-Hungarian composer who is most famous for his contributions to avant-garde music in the twentieth century. He devised a system of composition based on the manipulation of 12-note scale patterns that gave equal importance to each note in the chromatic scale. Known as the twelve-tone method, or dodecaphony, it relied on serial methods where the composer uses the 12-note scale patterns in pre-determined ways (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

“Look, just play the rhythm correctly and you can hit almost anything down there. It is so low that the correct pitch is hard to hear. But please, don’t by accident play a C major chord,” he commented with utmost seriousness before realising the absurdity of what he had just said.

We both laughed. This piece was so dissonant and contained not a single consonant sound. If I were to play a chord that sounded consonant, it would be wrong. In tonal music, the incorrect chords usually sound dissonant. It was all the wrong way around. Our laughter eased the tension and helped develop a rapport between us that was going to be essential if we were to perform the work successfully in public.

The performance required intense concentration. There was not a moment where I could relax. I had to keep counting intently, watching the piano and the flute parts, as well as the flautist to maintain our ensemble. I felt as though I had held my breath for the entire time of the performance, but I was actually trying to match my breath with that of the flautist. He had great lung capacity and could hold the long phrases for what seemed an eternity. The rhythmic and harmonic language of this piece was so far from tonality that at no time could I relax and let my ear be the judge of my performance. It was as if I had to check every note I played as well as keep looking forward to perform the piece as it unfolded. This constant going backwards and forwards kept my mind racing. Every ounce of my consciousness was consumed by this concentration.

I felt as if there was nothing left of me to worry about minor things such as personal comfort or even the audience and their reactions. I knew that most people would be totally unaware of how difficult this piece was to perform. The strange aural landscape of twelve-tone music was never intended for audience pleasure. Composers used this system because of its mathematical possibilities in creating musical structures conforming to the composers preconceived notions of symmetry and order, yet it is one of the ironies of this system of composition that this highly organised symmetry and order usually strikes the ear as chaotic and random. As one of the performers, I could appreciate the composer’s purpose and intention, as I had studied the score thoroughly. I also knew that my performing partner knew every note intimately. It was my job to meet his expectations of performance and not the audience’s.

The discerning audience appreciated our performance and my partner warmly congratulated me after the concert. He knew how hard it was to pull off a performance of this demanding work. These types of experiences are characterised by great surges of adrenalin to get through the performance. The euphoria lasts for several hours and then I would come crashing down. That night was no exception. Once I had wound down and relaxed, I slept very well knowing that the performance had been a success and I had met the standards expected of me.

Part 26

My ability to concentrate intensely during an extremely challenging musical performance has gradually improved over my musical career. This type of concentration allows me to focus my attention fully on the musical score while at the same time have an intense awareness of the other musicians in the ensemble. One particular eisteddfod performance stands out as an example of how a high level of concentration can be important in providing an instant solution to an immediate and difficult problem.

The performance I am thinking of took place on a busy night for me as the main accompanist for the eisteddfod's operatic aria section. The level of competition was quite high and each singer had chosen something challenging to sing and equally challenging for me to play. I arrived at the side of the stage before the section began, earlier than most of the performers, to try to find a good spot to sit. The dimly lit side of stage area was bathed in a dim blue light – great for singers to lose themselves in their moment – treacherous for me as their accompanist, trying to prepare for a string of different performances. I, instead, needed a spot that gave me a bit of light to see my music and help me focus on the uniqueness of each work. I had eight arias to play and, as accompanist, I had to be the orchestra, creating the atmosphere by playing the music in the correct style with due attention to the musical details. I also keep an eye on (and an ear out for) the singer. If they falter, I have to catch up with them. If they skip a bar or two, or even a whole section, I have to skip over the music too and find where

they are – all without the audience even being aware that we had encountered a problem.

The first singer performed the aria *Porgi Amor*⁶⁹ from Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. The aria began with a long and slow piano introduction, time for me to breathe, relax and feel the gentle movement of the semiquaver pulses. The singer joined me on page two and it seemed she was comfortable with my tempo and we were able to build the phrases together and negotiate the cadences. There are many long phrases, so I couldn't play too slow or she would run out of air, and I couldn't play too fast or I risked destroying the atmosphere created from the start. Many thoughts ran through my mind as we came to the end and took a bow: I had to smile, stand up nice and straight, walk off as elegantly as possible, look as if I had enjoyed myself.

At the side of stage, with hardly a moment to spare I grab the next piece, flick through the music, check the tempo, calm the singer down by trying to look relaxed and confident, and then we strode on stage together. The sequence of prepare, perform, then walk off elegantly, was repeated throughout the evening. Occasionally, I had a break and another accompanist took their turn, but the adrenalin had kicked in and I could feel my level of concentration rising – I was on a roll. It was just as well. I would need all the concentration I could get for the next performance.

It started off well: another Mozart aria.⁷⁰ This time, the piece was fast, light and exciting. We were on the main stage of the auditorium and we were making interesting music together and then I turned the page – nothing. The last two pages of music were missing.

A surge of adrenalin kicked in and I could feel the panic rising in me. Everything seemed to go in slow motion but I knew my mind was racing.

Should I stop and say to the audience, "Excuse me, but I can't play anymore – I don't have the music?"

⁶⁹ The aria *Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro* (Grant, love, some comfort) is sung by the Countess at the beginning of the second act of *The Marriage of Figaro* (Kobbe, 1989).

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that while I recall this experience most vividly I do not remember the actual aria that was sung other than that it was by Mozart and that it was fast.

I kept playing in the same style while at the same time flicking the pages backwards and forwards. Surely the music just in the wrong order and the missing pages would be somewhere in the folder.

There was nothing.

The final two pages of the aria were definitely missing and suddenly instead of relying on the written score I had to revert instantly to playing by ear. We had done some rehearsal on the work so that I knew the aria and how it was meant to finish, but I had never committed any of the musical detail to memory. I always performed with a score and had become an excellent reader of music scores over my many years as an accompanist. Playing from memory was not my strongest skill and so I had to try another tactic.

My music theory kicked in. What is the key? I quickly looked back at the key signature trying to process all the necessary information at lightening speed. What are the notes in the tonic, dominant, subdominant chords⁷¹? Should there be a cadential 6/4 at the end⁷²? Make it up – stay in the style. My thoughts were racing even as my hands kept playing, trying to create an accompaniment that would seamlessly blend from written score to improvised performance all in the style of a Mozart aria.

Finally, to my great relief, we arrived at the end. I had never stopped playing, despite the loss of the written score. The adrenalin, which seemed to supercharge my brain, overrode my sheer panic and I was able to improvise (somewhat) successfully to the end. Some of the audience members noticed that I was flicking the pages a bit too vigorously and my playing was ‘a little off’ at the end. I was able to laugh about it afterwards for I had learnt a good lesson: always check the pages yourself and never trust anyone else to prepare the music score you have to play from. But more than that, is the importance of knowing the style of music that you have to play. No matter the genre, classical, music theatre, popular, each style of music has its own expectations with regard to rhythmic

⁷¹ The tonic chord is built on the first degree of the scale, the dominant on the fifth and the subdominant on the fourth degree of the scale (Turek, 1996).

⁷² Music of this period usually concludes with a chord progression that includes the tonic chord in second inversion. This is known as a cadential 6/4 and is usually followed by an authentic cadence which is the dominant chord followed by a tonic chord both in root position. This usually signals the end of the work (Turek, 1996).

and harmonic structures. A sound knowledge of the theoretical constructs of these styles can be a valuable tool for an accompanist in all situations, let alone in rescuing performances that go wrong.

Part 27

The ability to cultivate an intense level of concentration as an accompanist has been particularly useful when performing in situations with minimal rehearsal time. This often happens if the artist you are working with only arrives on the day of the concert. They usually send the musical score ahead of time so that the basics can be dealt with in private rehearsal, leaving the minimal time together to deal with issues of ensemble playing and the interpretation of the work.

One such event was the cabaret performance with Robert, an Australian performer now performing in Las Vegas, who arrived in our city at midday of the day of the evening concert. We had little time to put everything together, but I was confident it would all work. I knew this genre of repertoire well and we had been discussing the content of the concert for several weeks by email. Robert had put together a couple of medleys of music theatre songs and also included some new works in his show. Some of these new works were cut-down versions so that they would work in context of his cabaret performance. I had done this sort of accompaniment many times before, performing with students their one-person shows and cabarets as part of their assessment. The idea of piecing together lots of songs around a theme was a familiar concept for me now. I was also comfortable working with scores that were rearranged to suit a new concept even though this often involved changing the key of the songs and working out new endings to suit their new context. I was calm, clear-headed and excited to work with a professional performer who was also a personal friend. We had known each other for many years but we had not worked together for the last six years.

I had a number of things on my mind before that concert. Only three weeks before I had an operation on my hand to release a ‘trigger’ finger⁷³ on the ring

⁷³ Stenosing tendovaginitis, or ‘trigger finger’, is a clinical condition characterised by a painful ‘locking’ or ‘clicking’ of the digit. It can occur in any finger but is common in the thumb and ring

finger of my right hand. Would my finger stand up to the strain? My personal practice the day before had felt fine – the fourth finger seemed to become less and less stiff as I played. It was a bit like getting out of bed in the morning and being stiff and sore, and then feeling your legs loosen up as you go for a walk. Although I had felt some reservations about this finger in the weeks leading up to the performance, its quick healing had been a great relief. So much so that I didn't even bother to tell Robert about the problem finger. It didn't impede on my playing, and besides, we had so little time to get the program together as it was.

Robert and his wife needed a bit of a rest before the evening concert as they had been travelling from overseas, so we aimed to get the rehearsal completed in less than an hour. Robert was great to work with – so relaxed and yet so in control of his voice. He knew how far he could push himself in rehearsal – he sang very little, and only occasionally sang out at full voice. He 'marked' all his work and we zoomed through the preparation.

Arriving over an hour before the concert, I felt very relaxed, chatting with the other staff who were working on sound and lighting. The piano was shifted to the right spot so that the stage lights allowed me to see the music easily. I even needed my own microphone as I had a couple of 'singing' parts in the show, which were there for comic effect. I was looking forward to these little comic moments in the program. I knew that I would have to concentrate to include them even as I played so I marked the score with lots of highlighter to give myself a visual reminder and allow myself plenty of time to prepare for those moments.

Shortly before the concert, I conducted a television interview with local news crew. I was caught a little off guard by their arrival and their request for an interview but by that stage the adrenalin was starting to push me into performance mode. Funnily enough I still felt in total control as I spoke to the camera – no hums and ahs – just clear sentences that gave maximum opportunity to state what was happening and give a plug for forthcoming events at the same time.

finger. The treatment requires day surgery under general anesthetic (Kovel & Zuckerman, 2004). I have not known any other pianist suffering this complaint but it is reasonably common in those who use their hands a lot.

The high levels of adrenalin ensured my concentration was high throughout the performance. I felt in control at all times and was calm as I prepared ahead for each sequence so that I was ready for my own solo singing moments, as well as the page turns, cuts and vamps⁷⁴ as required. All those years of playing music theatre repertoire had paid off. I knew exactly what was expected of me and I could devote all my energies to melding my performance with the singer's. While most of my accompaniment performances to that time had been with student singers, there had also been plenty of opportunities to work with professional singers who are prepared to enter into an equal musical partnership in performance.

Robert was one such singer. I recall how easy it was to perform with him. I didn't have to look directly at him at all. I watched and read the music intently, but I could feel his intentions with his voice and body language. More importantly, I could hear his breath and I hooked onto his breathing patterns so that we became one as we performed the songs. His intake of breath and even the slightest of movements gave me important information about his intentions regarding the tempo, nuance of phrase as well as the intensity of the dynamic levels. Robert was so good at signalling these things. I could see and hear enough without directly watching him using my peripheral vision.

Even other audience members noted the level of rapport in our performance. It was the morning after the concert – a Monday morning – and I was enjoying a tea break with one of my musician friends who had been at the concert.

“He is such a fantastic performer, so confident, and so easy to accompany,” I mused.

The performance the previous night had been extremely enjoyable for me as well as for the audience members. Robert had taken us all on a fascinating journey through his life illustrating his rising career with songs that were special to him, warmly inviting everyone into his life.

⁷⁴ A ‘vamp’ is an improvised accompaniment often consisting of a repeated chord passage. In cabaret settings, and in music theatre shows, it is often used by the piano accompanist to allow time for the singer to complete dialogue. A vamp can be used at anytime in the song as required. The term was used in the early days of music hall and indicated that a progression was to be repeated indefinitely until a soloist entered (McLamore, 2004).

“You were very relaxed last night,” commented my friend. “You seem to be getting better and better, if that is possible, with your accompanying.”

We broke off our conversation to return to our daily routine of teaching, intermingled with administrative tasks and incessant emails. These performances were highlights in our working lives and reminded us both of why we were musicians.

Part 28

The quick learning of accompaniments relies on good sight-reading skills. Many people have tried to develop methods for improving sight-reading and have tried to analyse the skills of competent sight-readers in order to better pass on these skills to other musicians. I know that during my early years of development as a pianist I was terrified of sight-reading and I needed hours of practice before I could play a piece. I would learn each hand separately and would painstakingly put both hands together, first at a slow tempo, and then gradually working up to the performance tempo. Each new piece could take weeks to learn.

But once I was no longer a student, I have rarely had that luxury of time as an accompanist. Sometimes I get a week to learn some music, sometimes a day, and sometimes only a few moments before I am required to perform the music in public.

The music theatre audition accompanist is one of the most demanding of roles because only a brief time is allowed to see the music before performing it. As each auditionee enters the room, they present the pianist with their music and there are only a few moments to look at it before they start to sing – this is sight-reading at the edge. It requires an intense level of concentration, yet at the same time, an awareness of the performer for whom you are accompanying. You need to be attuned to their volume, tempo, and nuance so that your style of playing can match the intent of their performance. After all, they are giving their all to secure a role in the music theatre production and as the accompanist, you are part of this presentation.

I remember one audition session in particular. The audition panel sat behind a long desk covered with folders, scripts, pen, pencils and staplers. There was the producer, the director, musical director, choreographer and technical director – the whole team presented a formidable obstacle as each auditionee entered the room. Each singer put on a brave face, trying to mask the terror they felt inside as they shook hands with the director and made their way to the piano. They each had five minutes to sing one or two songs and demonstrate their talent for the panel.

“What would you like to sing first?” I asked each as approached me. I smiled and tried to offer a reassuring voice to calm their stage fright.

Each performer presented me with their folder of music and I had only a moment to glance at it before we were off. I was a little jittery for the first singer, but as the day wore on I had no nerves whatsoever and was quite relaxed about each performance. I could follow whatever they did with each song and could enjoy the performances that were being created. But more importantly, the lack of nerves on my part helped to create the ideal cognitive environment for the intense level of concentration required for this type of sight-reading. There is no time for practice, just time to establish a tempo, check the key signature and connect with the groove of the rhythm. Finding the correct style for each piece is one of the core elements of successful accompaniment for auditions. There is no time for rehearsal, and many times the performance will not be note-perfect, but the performer on the stage needs the accompanist to capture the correct style and rhythmic groove so that they can settle into a convincing performance for the audition panel.

Knowing that I was not the centre of attention for these audition panels also helped. They were intently watching each singer, trying to encourage them to give their all and show off their potential. My performances slipped into the background as they supported the events on the stage – and this was exactly how I intended my playing to be. In fact, the sign of my success was that no one does really notice me. The accompaniments blend with the singers in a series of seamless performances.

Part 29

As I have gained confidence in performing this way, sight-reading has become exhilarating for me as an accompanist. Over the years, I have played thousands of accompaniments, especially in the music theatre repertoire, so that there are very few new pieces for me to learn in this genre. Therefore, finding new works and playing rarely performed gems in this repertoire is a real treat.

Love Never Dies written by Andrew Lloyd Webber as a sequel to his highly successful music theatre work *The Phantom of the Opera*, first opened to the public in 2010. Its scoring emulates the lush scoring of *The Phantom of the Opera* and I recently had the opportunity to play selections from *Love Never Dies* in a concert performance with an accomplished tenor. Although the music score itself was not difficult to play, the challenge came in finding an interpretation that would allow the combination of melody, harmony and lyrics to work together in a seamless whole. We had little time to rehearse together, and recordings of the songs were scarce at this time leaving us only the music score to work with in developing our interpretation.

Given these challenges, the public performance looked like it would have all the ingredients to become something special, or a complete disaster. I was looking forward to bringing a unique interpretation to this work and during the performance itself, it seemed my attention was drawn to many places at the one time: watching the score, listening to the singer and responding to his breath and phrasing, shaping my dynamics and phrasing to anticipate these musical ideas and responding to the singer's ideas as they were created. The performance itself was particularly memorable as we worked the phrases and the *rubato* drawing out the lush romanticism of the music. It really felt as if the work was being created as we performed, and was even remarked on by an audience member after the concert.

"I could see you working together with that song from *Love Never Dies*," she remarked enthusiastically.

"Yes, it was really different in performance than the rehearsal," I replied. "I felt as if we had found new musical ideas even as the performance was progressing."

“You just captured the passion of the music. It was like you were feeding off each other.”

Her remarks led me to recall another memorable performance where the melding of singers and piano in performance also left the audience in awe as well as the performers. The work came from *Porgy and Bess*, an opera written in 1935 by George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward. It is a very familiar work to many, yet its musical demands are such that it is a rare to find proficient singers capable of capturing its drama and pathos in a moving and convincing way.

On this occasion we were performing the love duet from this opera, *Bess You Is My Woman*. This has long been a favourite of mine and the accompaniment is a piano reduction of the orchestral score. It is difficult to play and requires the pianist to emulate the sweeping exuberance of the symphony orchestra, above which the baritone and soprano soar with their passionate melodies.

The two singers were experienced professionals, but we were all almost total strangers in terms of musical collaboration. The concert brought together soloists who had performed in a large oratorio work the day before. They had come from all over Australia and during our brief rehearsal during the morning of the concert day we established a sense of our musical direction and intent with the works to be presented that evening. The singers were secure in their singing technique and musical understanding. They could harness immense sounds from their voices so that each phrase could linger with anticipation before cascading forward to the next point of tension and release.

The rehearsal had been brief so that when we went on stage for the performance, there was a sense of rawness in our preparation. It was on the edge. Even though I knew the work well, there was a sense that anything could happen and this heightened my awareness of my surroundings. I could hear the singers' breathing, both in and out, and without directly watching them, their intuitive body movement gave me all the signals I needed in my peripheral vision to capture the *rubato* and shifts in the tempo as the performance echoed the passion of this love duet. The peaks of each musical phrase occurred in perfect harmony

and they were stretched out almost too far before falling away to the end of the phrase.

This music is so well written for the accompanist too, even though it is an orchestral reduction. In between each vocal phrase, the supporting harmonic structure builds intensely towards the next phrase. As I caught the excitement of these orchestral sections, the singers could then latch onto this emotional intensity and use it to propel them into the next phrase. *Bess you is my woman* contains many such emotional and musical peaks and this is George and Ira Gershwin at their finest. Ira's lyrics drive the passion forward using George's harmonic and melodic language inflected with jazz and blues nuances to create an opera that has become one of the great works of the twentieth century. The song ends with a tender caressing melody from each singer as it moves to the final soft chords where the singers and piano move in union together. This performance had everything. The singers had the vocal capacity to realise this music to its full potential. I felt a part of that performance as I took the accompaniment and shaped it to draw every last piece of expression from it. The spine-tingling finish left me breathless. Something magical had just happened on the stage – the performers, the music, my accompanying – it was truly memorable.

It didn't matter for me what the audience were doing. I was totally wrapped up in our performance on the stage. My awareness of my own playing and the two singers totally filled my own psyche and I was almost totally unaware of the audience also watching this performance. Their reaction was also wildly positive, but that was not the most memorable part of the experience – what happened between us as three performers on the stage remains clearly in the memory as a high point of my musical experience.

Part 30

As an accompanist, I have, as described above, worked with both singers and instrumentalists. There are distinct differences from the accompanist's point of view and I know many accompanists who specialise in one area over the years. Living in a regional city, I do not have that type of luxury. I am in demand

to accompany all performers. This has included choirs with conductors as well as groups of singers without conductors.

Accompanying groups of singers without a conductor draws upon skills that are shared with highly experienced chamber musicians. The musicians are all important in their own right but they need to work hard to blend their sound with the group as a whole. Relying heavily on body language to communicate musical ideas to each other, ensembles without a conductor can provide audiences with a dynamic and exciting experience of music making. This body language is built on trust within members of the group and this can take some time to build before an effective ensemble performance can occur. Working as the accompanist of a small vocal ensemble for two years, I found that this trust was built over successive performances, and was particularly honed during several concert tours and a recording session.

Recording an album with this vocal ensemble provided a unique set of challenges to me as their accompanist. I knew the musical strengths and weaknesses of each member of the group and through our intensive rehearsal sessions we had made musical decisions about our repertoire, particularly those associated with tempo, dynamic, *rubato* and the shaping of phrases. Our early concert performances had provided many opportunities for me to internalise these musical decisions, but going into the recording studio presented me with a new set of problems to overcome.

The songs were recorded by firstly laying down the piano track. I had to recreate each of the songs without the singers being present. I was in fact accompanying a phantom group in my head. Each song needed to be played with all the detail of tempo, dynamic, phrasing and *rubato* that we had achieved in performance but all I had to go on was the memory of those performances.

“Just relax,” coaxed the recording engineer. He seemed to take this all in his stride and had great confidence that I could pull this off in a short time. I was not so sure.

I settled at the piano ready to record the first song, choosing a track that was not too technically difficult, and I managed to create a near accurate

performance the first time. We took one more recording and fixed up the smallest of errors. I was pleased that had gone so well.

This bolstered my confidence to proceed to a song I thought I knew well. The introduction included some rather awkward octave passages that needed to be played in a legato style and with a great deal of tenderness. It was quite a demand on my technique. I breathed in and began to play. The first take was a mess. The emphasis had fallen on all the wrong notes. It sounded like a beginner pianist fumbling around instead of a professional recording artist.

“Let’s start again,” I said. I was determined to do better.

Breathe. Think. Relax. Take two was even clumsier than before. Why couldn’t I get this right?

I tried again. Each time the performance seemed to contain more mistakes than the previous. Even when I finally managed to record the introduction with the tenderness and emotion I was after, I had trouble focusing on the rest of the piece. I was beginning to fall apart mentally. We tried another strategy – we moved on to the next track. It worked. I managed to regain my composure and focus and the next track was recorded in only two takes.

We finally put down all of the ten tracks that afternoon and the mental stamina required to maintain this high level of focus and concentration left me exhausted at the end of the process. It was much more difficult to record without the singers being there in person, as I had no one to follow as I played. Instead of being the accompanist who responds to the performer, I was the one creating the music for the singers to later respond to. It was an odd experience and it took me while to feel comfortable in that role. The medium of recording was also out of my comfort zone so that whenever things went wrong, the mistakes would compound. I was very aware that I needed to achieve perfection for a recording and so my aural awareness seemed to increase through the recording session. I knew had to live with that recorded performance for a long time, unlike live performance, which only lives on in the memory.

Fortunately, during the recording session I was able to relax sufficiently so that I could focus on the music and not on my mistakes. I matched my breath as a pianist with those the singers would take when they later added their tracks on

top of mine. I shaped the phrases so that the peaks coincided with those the singers would intuit in their later performance. I tried to imagine each performer as I played their phrase and the whole process became a lot more accurate as well as musically interesting.

The social connections between members of this vocal ensemble were vital during the process of recording an album and were forged not only through the arduous process of creating an album together, but also through the usually humorous interactions while we were travelling between venues. As the accompanist and also the only female member of the group, I was at once both an insider and outsider. Both roles served me well as the accompanist of the group. As an insider I was able to understand the musical strengths and weaknesses of each member of the group and thus tailor my accompaniment performance to support them individually in the best way possible. As an outsider, I could view the group as a whole and create an accompaniment that brought the artistic vision of the group to life. Larger choirs rely on the conductor to undertake this outsider role, shaping the performance in action, creating and realising the artistic vision. In small ensembles without a conductor, as the accompanist I had a responsibility to recreate the artistic vision of the group and provide a platform for its credible performance.

However, not all venues provided me the opportunity to realise these ideals and I was thrust into difficult situations on many occasions. One such experience occurred with a performance with this vocal group on an open stage in a grass park in the middle of the day. The stage was made up of modular sections that moved as you walked across them. The midday sun was beating mercilessly on the black stage making it incredibly hot, even to the point of causing the soles of our shoes to start to melt. I was provided with a digital piano perched precariously at the back edge of this stage. There was a makeshift music stand for my music and a small unadjustable stool. It was not looking or feeling particularly inspiring for a musical performance.

The sound check happened a few minutes before we performed.

“We’ll get each of you guys to sing into the microphones and set the level,” announced the sound technician as he adjusted the levels on the mixing board. “Then we’ll do the piano.”

I had a few moments to find the on-off button and select a suitable sound before we arrived at levels that we hoped would work in performance. The sound technician inspired little confidence within our group but we were totally at his mercy.

This venue provided our group with great challenges to remain true to our artistic integrity and give a solid and professional performance. It was so hot in the sun that it took all our energy to stay smiling and complete the set as required. I longed for a breeze, as did the vocalists, yet at the same time, knew that any strong breeze would blow my music score around making it impossible to provide the accompaniment they needed as singers. As predicted, the sound technician gave us patchy fold-back through the speakers at the front of the stage making it extremely difficult for the singers to hear each other, and for me to hear each singer and balance my sound with theirs. In an acoustic hall, I have that level of control to balance the sound and this is an important part of my role as accompanist. In an outdoor setting, there is little control from the stage. I just relied on doing what we had rehearsed and hoped that the sound for the audience was as pleasing as it should have been.

It seemed to take forever to get to the end of the set and find relief under the shade of a tree away from the black stage. Sunglasses and hats did little to alleviate the heat. We performed our set and drew a hasty retreat.

Outdoor performance settings and other less than optimal performance settings have always been frustrating for me as an accompanist. I know my role is important to the performer who is relying upon me to provide a solid foundation for their performance. When my own experience is uncomfortable in terms of the elements, the poor quality of the instrument or the quality of the sound that is produced, it is very difficult to provide an empathetic performance or reach any level of artistic excellence. In these circumstances, I have had to draw upon all the skills I have developed in rehearsal, ignore my own levels of

discomfort, and concentrate even harder to focus on supporting the performer. These performances also become memorable, but for all the wrong reasons.

Part 31

In large choirs, the bond between conductor and accompanist is a unique one. Some conductors will take a quite dictatorial role in the musical direction of a performance. Indeed, directing a large group of people, such as a choir, in a performance requires a number of important leadership qualities. My own experiences with choral conductors have been most memorable when the partnership between conductor and accompanist is on a more equal footing. This type of mutual respect can create a formidable partnership that can drive the whole group of performers as one musical body. These partnerships are, however, put to the test in competitions such as eisteddfods as this next experience recalls.

The eisteddfod had reached its third and final day. The auditorium was filled with expectant performers, eager to demonstrate their abilities, and an audience of keen listeners, drinking in the feast of fine music. The eighty performers filed onto the stage filling the choir stands. They knew the routine well by this stage yet the high level of concentration was palpable as everyone focused their attention on the conductor. I fixed my gaze onto the music but I also I had the conductor clearly in my peripheral vision. I needed to have my total concentration on the music I was about to play yet, at the same time, have a focused awareness of the conductor and his every move. We were all quite close together on the stage so we could almost hear each other's breathing and respond to the musical nuances that were to be created in performance.

The piece was *O Fortuna* from Carl Orff's choral work *Carmina Burana*.⁷⁵ It begins with several bars of thunderous chords, the choir and piano playing in

⁷⁵ Written in 1935 by the German composer Carl Orff (1895–1982), *Carmina Burana* is a cantata for choir and orchestra based on twenty-four medieval poems. The opening and closing section of this cantata, *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi (O Fortuna)* is the most famous chorus and has been used extensively in movies, television and advertising (Burkholder, et al., 2006) and is often used to set the scene in dramatic or cataclysmic situations.

exact rhythmic unison. “*O Fortuna, velut luna, statu variabilis*⁷⁶” (Orff, 1965). The drama of the music instantly changes as the low, clipped melody is held suspensefully over a driving rhythm in the bass. “*Semper crescis, aut decrescis, vita detestabilis, nunc obdurate, et tunc curat, ludo mentis aciem, egestatem, potestatem dissolvit ut glaciem*⁷⁷” (Orff, 1965). Even as the harmonic changes urged us on with excitement, we held the tempo rock steady and the dynamics stayed hushed and menacing, creating a sense of foreboding and tension. I watched intently as the conductor held us all back, keeping the volume at *pianissimo*⁷⁸ level and the tempo controlled, driving the tension higher and higher.

When we finally arrived at the *fortissimo*⁷⁹ section, he released our sound like a spring and I too burst into the piano passage with gusto. “*Sors salutis, et virtutis, michi nunc contraria, est affectus, et defectus*⁸⁰” (Orff, 1965). I felt a sense of being carried along with the intensity of the music as if in a blur, yet at the same time there was an increased level of concentration for I knew I could easily get lost with the speed of this music. The final section is marked *presto*⁸¹ and together with the conductor we raced with exuberance towards the end. We had never performed it at that speed before, but the adrenalin shot from the intensity of the performance pushed us all along. Such was the concentration of the whole choir that we stayed together to the end, breathless yet exhilarated.

The audience reaction was enthusiastic for they had sensed the raw energy of the performance. The adjudicator also felt the energy and awarded the performance first prize against choirs that sang in a more measured and controlled way. The collaboration between conductor, pianist and choir had pulled off this memorable performance and cemented the trust in this multi-faceted partnership. It was a clear example of collaborative music making in action. As accompanist I was an integral part of that partnership and felt I had an

⁷⁶ O Fortune, like the moon you are changeable (Orff, 1965)

⁷⁷ Always waxing or waning; hateful life first oppresses and then soothes as fancy takes it; poverty and power it melts them like ice (Orff, 1965).

⁷⁸ *Pianissimo* means to play very softly (Turek, 1996).

⁷⁹ *Fortissimo* means to play very loudly (Turek, 1996).

⁸⁰ Fate, in health and in virtue, is against me, driven on and weighted down (Orff, 1965)

⁸¹ *Presto* means to play at a very fast tempo (Turek, 1996).

equal role in the musical direction of each performance. It is an ongoing relationship and one that continues to be challenging and musically satisfying for me.

Part 32

My accompaniment career took on a new challenge several years ago when I began playing the piano for classical ballet exams. The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) examinations are always conducted with a pianist rather than recorded music, thus allowing the dancers to respond musically to the performance. As with any live performance, the tempos are never exactly the same and so the dancers are required to demonstrate a high level of aural musicianship as they match their steps to the live music. The live performance also brings greater clarity and attack to the music and the dancers are encouraged to respond to this in their dances and exercises.

As an accompanist, this sort of work has many challenges that are quite different to working with singers, instrumentalists or ensembles. The first thing I noticed was that even though I was the accompanist for the dancers, I was in fact performing as a soloist. There were no other musicians to hide behind and so I had a greater responsibility to complete the performance with a high degree of accuracy. Despite the fact that the accompanist is expected to play as a soloist, the quality of instruments can vary considerably between dance schools. Some provide quality acoustic or digital pianos, but some of the acoustic pianos are only ever used for the annual exams so they are often out of tune, and in the case of some digital pianos, they are worn out and of a poor quality to start with.

The music is different for each grade so that in any one day I could be playing seven or eight different sets of music, each one lasting about forty minutes. I was new to ballet exam accompanying so this represented a large body of music to learn and become confident playing in an exam situation. Dancers performing in any style rely heavily on tempo and rhythm (Lishka, 1979). A few pitch mistakes can be tolerated, but get the tempo or rhythm wrong, and they suffer.

“Can we do that exercise again Judith?” asks the dance teacher during the exam practice section. “It needs to be just a little faster to help those with short legs, but when we get to the repeat, can it just be a little slower to let the tall girls jump higher?”

I was starting to realise that this would be a repeated request throughout the session. The trouble was that these requests – a little faster, a little slower – was faster and slower than what? Tempo was becoming my nightmare and I soon cultivated an ability to recognise a tempo by its metronome marking even when I had no time to check an actual metronome before I began playing. It was impossible to remember the exact tempo for every piece across the eight grades so my pencilled in notes about metronome speeds were immensely useful.

It also soon became clear that accompanying dancers did not mean following them to the same extent that I would follow singers. For most ballet exams, there are often two or four dancers performing at once. I soon gave up trying to match my tempo to their jumps. Instead, I set a tempo that was somewhere in the middle and hoped that they would be able to listen and modify their movements to the music.

The forty minutes of an exam goes very fast. Even in the earliest grades, the music is very technically challenging to play and concentration needs to be intense. But such concentration has its rewards too. There is the palpable satisfaction gained from playing beautiful music, for the ballet examination repertoire features some aesthetically pleasing musical examples. But even more rewarding is the experience of being challenged to perform at the peak of one’s ability, focusing intently throughout the forty-minute exam, and then, with just a minimal break, doing it all over again for another group of dancers. This goes on for a full day, so that sometimes I will be required to play up to eight ballet exams in a day. If I dare to let my mind wander during the exam, I am constantly jolted back to the present and forced to focus on the task of playing the music. As each exercise finishes, the examiner only gives the pianist enough time to turn the page and then the next piece starts.

“Let me see your *grand battements*,⁸²” chimes the examiner in her cultivated voice. “Ready? And.”

That’s my cue. Check the key signature, time signature and most importantly the tempo and off I go. There is no room for error – the dancers are relying on me to get it right for them. I don’t let them down.

Part 33

My eyes were aching. They felt dry and sore from the harsh stage lighting and the air-conditioning on the theatre stage. I had just come off stage after a mammoth two-hour performance of Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*.⁸³ I had been performing the continuo⁸⁴ part and true to its name, I played continually through the whole performance. The only breaks were momentary ones in between pieces – just enough time to turn the page, take in the new key signature, look at the tempo markings, watch the conductor for the starting signal and go.

“I have such sore eyes,” I commented to one of the choristers as we were coming off the stage. “I think I have been concentrating so much that I kept them wide open all the time.”

We both laughed.

“Well, you were playing all the time – you never stopped.”

“I suppose so. But I couldn’t take my eyes off the music the whole time – there was just no opportunity for a break. And besides, that music of Bach is so

⁸² *Grand battement* literally means “large beating”, in which the leg is lifted to hip level or higher and held straight (Warren, 1989). It is only one of many exercises that are performed as part of a graded classical ballet examination.

⁸³ Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248 over several years. Comprising six smaller cantatas, it was intended to be performed over several days during the Christmas season. It can be played in one performance with the whole piece taking about three hours to perform (Burkholder, et al., 2006). In our performance we omitted section four.

⁸⁴ The *continuo* is the keyboard (either harpsichord or organ) and bass part in a Baroque orchestra. In its original form, using the bass line and chord structure provided by the composer, the performer would improvise their part in the style of the period. In modern arrangements, the continuo part is fully written out for the performer (Burkholder, et al., 2006).

hard. You have to concentrate really closely for the whole performance just to make sure everything stays together.”

“It went off very well,” said the chorister encouragingly. “You didn’t miss a beat.”

It was a generous remark. There was a point, quite early in the performance when I had let my concentration lapse just a little. I started to think about how well the performance was progressing and how confident the choir was sounding – but I was soon to find out that was a foolish thing to start thinking about. It was at the beginning of a very complicated choral section that was also fast and difficult for the orchestra. My mind had wandered off the music and I couldn’t quite remember how this piece went, even though we had rehearsed it many times in the choral rehearsal rooms. I floundered in the rhythm in the opening phrase, even though the conductor was giving clear cues for the tempo. Immediately, there was a reaction from the choir as I heard a few voices hesitating causing a small chain reaction to other singers around them. With a jolt that brought me back to the reality of the performance, the adrenalin raced through me as I suddenly realised that it could all come apart. I was back on track again – I had the right rhythm and tempo, and the choir regained their confidence, tackling this section of the oratorio with vigour.

The adrenalin kept me at the peak of my concentration for the rest of the performance. I was sitting on the edge of my chair and kept my eyes wide open and my mind racing. I was totally aware of everything around me – the conductor, each section in the orchestra in front of, the choir behind me, and the soloists who took turns singing the various arias. I was not aware of any personal discomfort, even though sitting forward and stiffly on the chair was not the most comfortable position to be in. Neither did I stop to give my eyes a rest. It was one of the first times I had experienced this type of eye fatigue, but the stage lighting was coming directly on to me and seemed to dry out my tear ducts.

As the continuo player in this ensemble, I sat in the middle of the stage with the twenty-piece orchestra in front of me and the eighty-voice choir standing behind me in five rows on tiered choir stands. The choir was relying on my accompaniment, as it was difficult to hear all the orchestral parts at the back

of the stage where most of the choir stood. I was playing an electronic keyboard to emulate the sounds of the Baroque continuo part, in this case, a pipe organ. Its speakers were facing the choir who were behind me. They had the visual cues from the conductor and the aural cues from me at the keyboard. Although we had been rehearsing this work together for months, the performance still had the rawness of a new work. Everyone knew the parts but none of this work had been put under the pressure of a performance until this day. We all knew it could easily falter if there was a slip in concentration from the conductor or the continuo player.

There had been several months of rehearsal leading up to this one single public performance. Knowing that we had only one chance to demonstrate our capabilities in a public forum added to the level of concentration during the performance. Sitting in the middle of the stage with the choir behind me and the orchestra in front, I could sense the high level of anticipation as we approached the performance, and I knew that during the performance everyone was trying their hardest to perform to the best of their ability. In the end, there were no major lapses. Each performer on stage played their part to bring this large work together. We did not really need the audience to acclaim the performance. We knew we had executed the performance well and brought the music to life in a unique and inspiring way, such was the level of concentration and focused attention throughout the performance. All members of the ensemble – soloists, choristers and orchestral members experienced a sense of satisfaction. There was much frivolity as we all shared a meal after the performance, releasing the tension and concentration of the single performance, and basking in the compliments from discerning audience members who knew the work and could attest to the success of our performance. We already knew we had achieved our goal, but their confirmation was the ‘icing on the cake.’

Concluding remarks

As a musician, I have found the experience of writing this narrative both difficult and empowering. Difficult because written text is not my usual mode of expression. To achieve my goals of becoming a competent and professional

musician I spent many years developing my skills at the piano and challenging myself in new performance arenas. Writing was not generally part of that process. However, the process of creating this written narrative has been empowering because through this means I have found a way to document some of the elusive aspects of music performance. Musicians understand the process of performance intuitively and are often reluctant to write about these experiences. It is difficult to write about an artistic activity that happens in real time and, unless recorded, is completely unique to that one place and time. Regardless of whether the music has a notated score or is partly or completely improvised, no performance is ever repeated. Even a recording of the performance can never capture the thoughts of those who are performing. It merely relays the product of that artistic activity. Through the act of writing, using the lens of an autobiographical narrative, I have been able to reflect on my experience as a piano accompanist in music performance.

The narrative has enabled me to recreate some of the thought processes and personal struggles that have resulted in memorable performances. Each experience has been memorable in some way and has added to my repertoire of capabilities in this area of collaborative performance. Some of these have been in performance settings and some in rehearsal settings. Each vignette recounts aspects of these memorable experiences from a personal point of view. The narrative tries to show and describe these experiences in an approachable way to provide a means by which the reader can understand the experience of collaborative music performance for a piano accompanist. The process of writing has not lessened the quality and depth of the music performance phenomenon but has brought it to the fore to allow it to be subjected to more critical analysis.

After some forty years as a pianist, working with proficient as well as sensitive musicians in a performance setting that allows for a fresh and new approach to a musical work continues to be an experience I eagerly seek out as a piano accompanist. The thrill of finding new shapes and emotions in a piece of music, and particularly in a collaborative performance setting is one of the most exciting things about being an accompanist. Even if the musical insights are never expressed in words, they can be understood by all the performers as we explore together the inner emotions and artistic intent of the composer.

There is a great deal of satisfaction when the performance is note-perfect but this is a very rare occurrence. The integrity of the rehearsal process is always driven by the desire to produce a performance of high quality that is true to the composers' intentions and accurately reflects the details and subtleties of the style. This is a never-ending process of learning. But the true hallmark of a remarkable musical performance is that it goes beyond the mere regurgitation of notes or copying of a well known past performance. The best performances are those that capture the spirit of the music, carry the performers along in this spirit, thus reliving the composers' creative spark and bringing the music to life.

Is an audience important in this process? For some genres such as rock music, the screaming fans, lights, sounds effects and pyrotechnics on the stage can add atmosphere that enhances this performance for the audience. Classical concerts sound wonderful in settings where the acoustics are rich and complex, allowing the sound to carry clearly to everyone present. A smoky bar has often been thought of as the ideal setting to explore the nuances of jazz improvisation or the emotions of the torch song. However, memorable performances can also happen in rehearsal – without the buzz of an audience or the glare of a stage light.

The thesis that accompanies this narrative looks at the phenomenon of flow and how this is manifest in my collaborative music performance as a piano accompanist. After a review of the literature on flow and a discussion of the chosen methodology, autoethnography, the analysis examines the narrative for themes that are consistent with the various dimensions of flow. The results of this autoethnographic case study will provide a theory for the experience of flow for a piano accompanist and how this experience compares to the general dimensions of flow as proposed by Csikszentmihalyi.

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