

Part 2: The Second Generation

What is commonly labelled postwar modernism arrived fairly suddenly and quickly in Australia in the early 1960s. Its representative composers were born just before the outbreak of World War II, and, by the 1960s, they were at a time in their lives when such changes were ripe. The mix of composers included many who arrived in Australia as part of the huge wave of postwar immigration, and they brought with them the necessary materials and mind-set to overturn the hitherto dominant Anglocentric culture in our music institutions. The historic first Conference of Australian Composers, held in Hobart in 1963, was a clear demonstration of almost palpable open warfare between the first and second generations. New ideas from the avant-garde of Europe and America began to infiltrate our composers' thinking. For the first time in our history, composers became employable as teachers of composition in our tertiary institutions, instead of being smuggled in under the guise of teachers of harmony, counterpoint, history and aural training. Universities moved away from their traditionally dusty musicological roles and began a transition to centres of new musical thinking and live music making. The idea that one had to go abroad to complete one's education was now seriously questioned. The Australian Contemporary Music Ensemble appeared to be the prototype for many such ensembles in the years to follow. Australian music began to appear in the normal course of concerts, instead of being a frankly ghetto culture. For a while—regrettably short—the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation; ABC) was in the front rank of commissioning and performing bodies, actively encouraging the new Australian music. The meaning of the term 'Australian composer' had to be redefined and, for most, it was a move away from narrow nationalism and jingoism. The patriotic card was still being played, though, as it is still being played in the twenty-first century.